

3 1761 00076589 1

AUSTRALIAN  
SHOOTING  
SKETCHES

E. A. HENTY  
(Mrs. EDWARD STARKEY)



Copy:

With the compliments of  
the Author.

---







AUSTRALIAN SHOOTING  
SKETCHES



# Australian Shooting Sketches

And Other Stories

BY  
**E. A. HENTY**

*(Mrs. Edward Starkey)*

AUTHOR OF

"AUSTRALIAN IDYLLS AND BUSH RHYMES"

LONDON

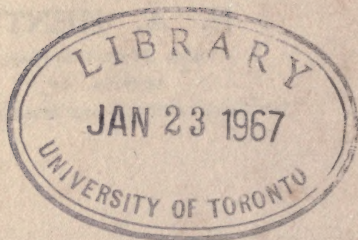
**Digby, Long & Co.,**

18 Bouverie Street, Fleet Street, E.C.

1907



PR  
6037  
T18948



## CONTENTS

PLATYPUS SHOOTING BY MOONLIGHT -	9
MY LAST KANGAROO HUNT - -	37
'POSSUMING UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS	53
EMU HUNTING AT COREENA - -	79
A NIGHT AFTER DUCK - -	105
SHARK FISHING IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS	127
A CINGALESE TRAGEDY - -	139
MY TERRIBLE NIGHT IN MALTA -	193
MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST - -	225
FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH - -	271

To

THE MARQUIS OF LINLITHGOW, K.G.,

The first Governor General of Australia, who so ably assisted to establish the Commonwealth, and to strengthen the bonds of Love between the dear Homeland and Australia,

and

TO THE MEMORY

of the Pioneers—Stephen, Edward, Frank and John Henty, the four enterprising brothers, who, in the early Thirties landed from their ship on the Coast, where they founded the Town of Portland, from there going into the interior, discovering and exploring the Western District of Victoria, being the first absolute Settlers in that fine Colony of Australia, and bringing with them their own farm servants, implements, and pure Merino Sheep—I dedicate this Book.



PLATYPUS SHOOTING BY  
MOONLIGHT



## PLATYPUS SHOOTING BY MOONLIGHT

The summer sun is sinking in the west,  
The evening wind is souging thro' the trees,  
The magpies, ere they settle down to rest,  
Fling out their tales of warbling on the breeze.  
The swan and black duck flapping overhead  
With heavy wing, unerring, to the swamps,  
The tall companions, with their stately tread,  
Stalk by the curlews at their nightly romps.

“Hullo, Lin! What the dickens are you fellows dawdling for? The horses are ready, and the moon is rising,” and Dick, my best friend, and partner in the station, thrusts his head through an open French window, he having left us an hour ago to order the horses to be run in from the “horse paddock,” a mile distant from the homestead, and to make arrangements generally for one of our little shooting diversions, without which life on a sheep station in the bush would indeed become burdensome.

This time we are off after Platypus—*Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*—at a river some ten miles distant.

I—Lindesay Pace—and my five guests are sitting over a late dinner, one or two



men being owners of adjoining stations, who now that the business of shearing is finished, have come over for a little amusement in the shape of sport.

Last time it was an emu hunt at the foot of the ranges, to-night after due consideration we have decided to begin with a platypus shoot as the moon is nearly at its full.

Dick's impatient exclamation startles us; but little Clarke, who is just up from the Melbourne University, answers laughingly, "Monkey tastes!" as he nods his handsome boyish face towards the depleted dishes of green almonds and passion fruit before us on the table, round which a heated discussion as to the best means of beguiling wild duck into range of the guns from the centre of a large neighbouring swamp has been absorbing us.

Dick's sudden reminder that time and the moon wait for no man causes us to hurry out to the front verandah, overlooking the gardens lying asleep in the dew, where the shrubs are as yet unscorched by hot winds, while the night air wafts towards us sweet with the scent of magnolia and

wisteria, which are doing their level best to oust great masses of scarlet japonica and purple bougainvillea from growing up one side of the solid-looking blue stone house, near by which a giant red gum—*Eucalyptus amygdalina*—stands solitary, its gaunt branches casting weird shadows on flower-beds and lawn.

Afar off beyond the gardens, with their pittisporum hedges gleaming a pale green; below the creek, and the willows, and at the foot of the fifty-acre paddock, here and there I catch a glimpse of the moonlight glinting on the waters of the swamp.

A baby wind born of the night creeps towards us, bringing mysterious murmurs of the night things, the “poomp, poomp” of the bull-frogs mingling with the melancholy cry of the curlew, and the harsh grating calls of the “native companions,”\* as they stalk amid the reeds.

Coming on to the back verandah, I hear a fine “hullaballoo” going on. All the animals on the place (and we own a regular menagerie) seem to have gone mad. One and all are acting like demons

\* Tall birds—a species of crane.

let loose. The dogs—three wiry-looking kangaroo hounds, rather like the breed of old Scotch deerhounds, only smooth-haired—unchained from their kennels at the foot of the gum trees in the home paddock are tearing wildly about, evidently harbouring the delusion that they are off for one of our night 'possum hunts, barking, yelping, fighting, and generally making night hideous, while Nellie and Fly, my two old retrievers, have thrown dignity and decorum to the winds, and having joined in the fray are as rampageous as any.

We speedily give orders for the kangaroo hounds to be tied up, much to their disgust, while some of the station "hands" are endeavouring to quell the riot, which is playing the mischief, or, as Campbell puts it, "Old Jerusalem" with the ponies waiting to convey our guns and ammunition in the single-seated buggy.

Small wonder! Yelps, howls, squeals, and squeaks resound. Even my pets, respectable old birds gone to roost long ago, for the most part are behaving like things demented—as unwilling victims certainly, for Spot, the fox-terrier, has unearthed



from his sleeping-place my pet curlew, and is racketing him up and down the verandah, as the poor old bird utters protesting and ear-splitting shrieks, followed by my two tame "maggies"\* which are flapping and squawking behind, joined in by my favourite grey cockatoo. No wonder the flying 'possum in his box at the end of the verandah thinks his last hour has come, and is darting in and out of his glory hole like some irate monkey at the Zoo.

"By Jove! What a row! Bedlam isn't in it," laughs Reggie Campbell, who is globe-trotting, and has taken us on his way to the Philippines and Japan, and who enters into every phase of bush life with the utmost zest and enjoyment.

"Quiet, Spot! Down, Nellie! Ur-r-gh-" I roar, and having energetically cuffed the fox-terrier, shooed the magpies to bed, soothed poor old Curly's feelings, quieted Billy the cockatoo, and generally restored order, we can hear ourselves speak, and pay attention to Dick's directions for a start. The ponies require a good deal of

\* Magpies, quite distinct from the English bird.

coaxing, but at last consent to go upon four legs and lead the way. Swinging ourselves into the saddle, we are soon off, and canter in pairs across the home paddock to the slip panels, beyond which lies the woolshed, where the busy scene of shearing has been going on; past the huts where some of the shearers are yarn-ing outside over a pipe, gazing with satisfied eyes on the bullock waggons piled high with the newly-dumped bales (for the clip has been a heavy one), waiting for an early start on the morrow to the nearest seaport. As we ride by the "Dip," the newly-washed sheep scamper away by thousands in all directions, looking like white wraiths in the moonlight.

The horses are still under the influence of the "hullaballoo," and we have not proceeded far before Kit, on my favourite mare (who is a champion at bucking), nearly comes to grief, till Dick in his kindly way saves the situation by suggesting that we should give the horses a breather as far as the boundary fence, offering, with his usual *bonhomie*, to race us all for a sovereign. Another moment and

we are off; and as I linger for a moment to shout directions for the men in the buggy to meet us at a given point by the river, ten miles distant, and give old Brownie his head, I hear a "Hurrah! forrard away!" and follow my companions already streaming before me across country.

Yoicks! Away we go at a rattling pace under the twinkling stars, with the wattle-scented night air—that perfume so well known to the bushman—blowing cool in our faces, across the open paddocks, passing here and there a blackened patch of timber, the huge gum trees, bleached and distorted into weird shapes, looking ghost-like in the moon rays, scenes of solitude and desolation, the result of the long drought, hot winds, and bush fires.

On past a vast swamp, where the few natives living in the district aver that the Bunyip (a mythical animal believed in by aborigines) still exists in the bottom of the Lagoon and drags himself out of the mud by night, where the startled water-fowl hurry off as the reed-beds crackle beneath our horses' feet, terrifying a family of baby moorhens which ought to have

gone to bed hours ago; and overhead the black swan fly heavily away, followed by the flapping of wild duck, a long line of which grows fainter and fainter as they follow their leader, until at last they only resemble a row of black dots, against the starlit heavens.

On and still on we go, galloping now over the grass as the moon rises above the ranges, now through a patch of scrub and into some dark ti-tree, where a mob of scrub cattle flee before us bellowing lustily; out again into the open and across a bit of sandy country, treacherous with wombat holes, and again into the timber, where the towering eucalyptus trees grow closely, hardly allowing the moonlight to penetrate, making the silence feel oppressive—for all the birds are asleep save a belated Indian mynah, whose startled note rings out, causing my horse to jump as we pass. Through brushwood and golden-tinted bracken we scramble, our horses sinking at times knee deep in the masses of maidenhair growing beneath the ferns; going easily now, for it is no joke dodging the trees. A kangaroo springs up from



the branches and hops noiselessly away, a silent grey figure, and one or two 'possums gaze down with their beady black eyes, then leaving their succulent supper of gum leaves, go scuttling away to their homes in the hollows of the giant trunks.

Leaving the bit of forest behind, away we race once more at a furious pace out into the open country, through deep gullies and a stony bit of country, where the thistles are having it all their own way. Afar off I can see Dick on the grey scouring along, pluckily followed by little Clarke, clearing all obstacles and sweeping over feathery grasses and ferns and brushwood, while the others follow looking (as a drift scuds over the moon) like "ghostly riders on phantom steeds."

I can see the station roofs of Brochick's afar off amid the timber as we cross the old track, and, splashing through a belt of ti-tree by the creek, reach the boundary fence, a stiff post-and-rail of red gum; but Dick riding reckless clears it at a bound (pulling up the mare now somewhat blown as he pats her reeking sides, which show that even for her the pace has been

hot), and waits for us.

One by one we join him, stopping for a moment to light our pipes, blowing the cool tobacco smoke behind us, as we once more jog on our way with many a cheery laugh and (to us) interesting discussion on the important subject of the late wool crop. Here and there in an isolated boxwood or shey-oak tree the magpies are warbling to one another, and the liquid notes float out on the still night air, filling Campbell, our English guest, with undisguised admiration.

"By Jove! it's beautiful; our nightingales are not in it," I hear him murmur, as, at his request, we rein in our horses, and stop to listen.

'Tis a glorious sound certainly to a newcomer, this merry warbling of the Australian magpies on a moonlight summer night. From tree to tree, the soft notes are taken up, and float out melodiously as mate calls to mate, and the answering note comes back from the scattered gums dotting the vast paddocks, while the full white moon rises over the ranges, and in time dims the brilliancy of God's watchers

—the stars—and pales the beauty of the Southern Cross.

Once again Dick warns us that the moon will soon be at its full, and we canter on till we reach the *rendezvous*, a well-known group of lichen-covered boulders at the bend of the river. Keeping well back from the water, we there quietly dismount and divide into two parties, the others riding on slowly while we wait for the buggy.

Little time is lost ; the fleet-footed chestnut ponies can do their sixteen miles an hour easily behind the light buggy, so we are soon in possession of our guns and ammunition, and leaving our horses in charge of the men, who tie them up to some logs and ungirth the saddles, we take old Nellie, the retriever, and silently wend our way to the water and choose a position by the river side.

Campbell, being a novice, has been handed over to me by Dick, with strict injunctions as to the best means of procuring him his first platypus. Creeping quietly along the banks, having sent the retriever to heel, we choose a likely spot, where a gum tree has fallen into the river,



and prepare to wait patiently.

Clarke climbs on the fallen trunk, and by dint of much wriggling gets well over the water, while we go a little lower down the bank, in the shadow of some slender gum saplings make ourselves as small as possible, and, like Brer Rabbit, "lay low."

Half an hour goes by. All is still. No sound comes to our listening ears save the mysterious murmurs of the night things, which hide with the light and only come forth at dusk, and the whisper of leaves. A mopoke's mournful note sounds uncanny in the stillness, unbroken save by a distant plover calling to his mate, mingling with the frightened chirp of a speckled jacksnipe (*Gallinago gallinula*) which rises at our feet, and goes off as a whirring, feathered ball.

Strange noises surround us as queer rustlings and chirpings reach us from hidden things, those mysterious murmurings that one hears on a hot night, telling of the hum of myriads of the unseen, in a world we wot not of! Personally, I revel in these nights out in the open, with the weird sounds and subtle scents of the bush amid the dusky shadows—away from

all the petty irritations, the trammellings, the narrowness of a city existence, there comes to me a sense of space, of vastness, of wonder, making one feel a renewed faith in one's Creator, and a little nearer to that Heaven which in the hurry and stress of a busy life seems sometimes so far off.

A scrambling amid the deadwood causes me to turn, and I see Campbell, who has avowed a holy horror of our snakes, looking ominously at me. Something certainly is moving; so Nellie growls, not being partial to the reptiles myself I sit up, and with a sense of silent relief shake my head smilingly at my companion as I nod towards the intruder, which my eyes, accustomed to the sights of the bush, have quickly discerned in a patch of moonlight.

It is a harmless grey lizard—one of the common scalefoots (*Pygopus lepidopus*)—no doubt as nervous as we are, for he hurries away round a branch, his slender, cylindrical body and tapering tail looking unmistakably snake-like in the moon rays, which show up here and there the black lines on his back. Snuggling his pointed snout low he disap-

pears, and once more we watch the river and lie in wait.

But not for long. A sound—a tiny splash—a ripple. This time I see a small object moving below and discover a platypus swimming leisurely to the bank.

Instantly three pairs of eager eyes search the river, and I resist the temptation to fire; but there is no time to lose if we mean to bag him. I let him land just below us; then I nod encouragingly and whisper, "Look out! Now!" A moment later Campbell's shot rings out. I perceive the small silver-grey object scuffle and roll over in the mud, then lie still. I see another ripple. Once again a shot is heard, and as I shoot I hear Clarke fire twice from his perch a little higher up the river. Ping! and once more silence descends upon us.

Waiting patiently for another fifteen minutes, as nothing more comes our way we rise from our cramped position, and I swing myself down the steep bank and send on the old dog for the game. One by one he fetches us three of the somewhat scarce little animals (a fourth escapes us, having



sunk), which we stow away in the sack ready for their reception.

Knowing that the noise will have scared everything in the vicinity, platypus specially being the most timid of animals, we agree to move on and search the river half a mile lower down.

I am showing the curious little beasts to Campbell, who is examining them with much interest, when an outburst of language enough to scare the 'possums for a mile round, followed by a tremendous splash, causes us to drop the platypus and turn sharply, in time to see Clarke, who has overbalanced, floundering in the river, he having slipped in scrambling back from his perch.

Fortunately he has gone in near the bank, and I have no misgiving save for the gun, which is an old favourite of mine. I see with satisfaction, however, that he is holding it safely with one hand, as spluttering and splashing he flounders his way to the side through the oozy black mud, and is soon on the bank, aided by us, who hasten to give him a helping hand. Once on *terra firma*, his appearance is too much

for us — what there is to be seen of him through a layer of black mud — and we give way to such a roar of hearty laughter as makes the bush resound. For a whole minute Clarke glares at us in a dismayed, reproachful way, and I hear him murmur, "Well, of all the unkind brutes!" But a glance at his mud-covered extremities is too much even for him, and lying back in the bracken he too laughs heartily till the silent bush echoes again, and for an instant a solemn silence falls upon the night things.


Then the eerie murmurings begin once more, and an owl hoots by, followed by a bat, which flitters near my face. The cachinnation is too much for the night animals. A timid native bear in the branches near by thinks discretion the better part of valour, and hurries away to his home in a hollow trunk, while one or two scared 'possums rustle off to the topmost branches. Even the mysterious murmurings of the insect life of the bush are hushed into silence for a moment. It is some time before we can face our comrade with equanimity; but the silence at last grows oppressive. Reggie Campbell recovers himself first, and splut-

teringly and apologetically offers advice as to the best means of getting rid of the mud. "Scrape it off! Here!" says Reggie, handing up a piece of bark, and politely and generously offering to help; a hint soon taken, for our unlucky companion finds several leeches adhering to his hands and face.

A little ashamed of my hilarity, though still shrieking internally, I pull myself together and feebly offer to assist, and between us we succeed in getting rid of some of the awful black ooze—no easy matter, for it adheres tenaciously, but after a busy ten minutes we are able at last to resume shooting.

All chance of platypus showing themselves now—they being the most wary of animals—is at an end in this disturbed portion of the river, so we decide to move on to a spot lower down, where a little group of rocks near the water's edge affords us cover.

'Tis a glorious Australian night. Overhead a radiant moon is shining, making the ranges stand out clear and solemn like sentinels of the night as I catch a glimpse of them through an opening in a patch of





ti-tree on the opposite bank. After separating a little, Reggie going off on his own hook, we take up our positions and lie alert, silent and watchful, with only the busy hum of night things for company, and the sough of the wind as it sighs through the shey-oaks.

Half an hour passes. I hear a splash; this time it is only a gay old water rat out for a midnight ramble. He catches sight of me, and darts away to his wife and family in a hole in the bank beneath a moss-grown rock. Once more silence reigns, and the solitude possesses one with a sense of the awful loneliness of the bush. I hear the far-off howl of a dingo, like the wail of a lost soul trying to escape from its solitude. A great bronze beetle booms by and thuds with an angry buzz against my hat, then falls on his back with a disabled wing. I feel a grim satisfaction in knowing he has hurt himself, for he has startled me out of a pleasant reverie, and made me realise that my position is giving me cramp, though I dare not move for fear of snapping a twig. I fall to watching a couple of pugilistic bull-dog ants, whose

acquaintance I have no desire to make, and who in their excitement are peregrinating momentarily nearer me, and devoutly hope I am not over a nest! A restless movement of the retriever, whose pricked ears draw my attention to the water, shows me in a patch of moonlight a ripple at last, and I discover another platypus. I wait till he reaches the opposite bank.

Bang! bang! I let fly, and, to my chagrin, miss! But Campbell is ready lower down, and is more successful. And so the night goes on. Bit by bit we work the river, losing one or two animals, quite oblivious of time, till the moon disappears behind the tree tops, and the light grows bad as the orb sinks lower and lower, and a rosy streak in the east tells us that the day is breaking, and it is time to desist; so we stroll along to the place appointed to meet our comrades.

No signs of them are to be seen, but the buggy and horses are waiting a little back in the timber, where we light our pipes and stretch ourselves for a rest. A delicious drowsiness steals over me, and a pleasing satisfaction with our night's

work, when I am roused by hearing afar off a faint "Coo-ee!" Clarke springs up with a jubilant "There they are!" as he sends a ringing answer back in his strong young voice. "Coo-ee! Coo-ee!" breaks the silence, scaring the animal world; and ten minutes later we are joined by our comrades. An animated scene takes place as we compare notes. They have not been quite so successful as our party; but all things considered, we have not done badly, for the platypus grow scarcer year by year, and are by no means easy of being attained.

Our bag is a heterogeneous one. "Eleven platypus, one wallaby (native name for kangaroo), one bandicoot, and a tiger snake." Dick counts out, bemoaning the time they have wasted in hunting for the latter; but, like myself, my *fidus Achates* and partner never lets a snake go if perseverance and a settled determination to kill can avail.

Campbell again with interest examines minutely, as many before him have done, the queer little platypus with their soft silvery grey fur, webbed feet, and duck-like



bills, so aptly termed by the scientist *Ornithorhyncus paradoxus*, till at last he tears himself away, and as we set out for home the men having stowed the sacks in the buggy, I have visions of seeing the carriage rug—which requires at least sixty picked skins, and for which I have been collecting with the patience of Job for many a long day—nearer completion.

All well pleased with our night's work, we regain our saddles, and set off with a certain amount of freedom from haste, born from the fatigue and long night watching, though one and all hilarious every time our glance falls upon Clarke whose appearance in the dawn can only be described as "mottled," queer patches of black dried mud still adhering to him in unsuspected places, of which he is delightfully unconscious.

Away to the east the sun is rising over the ranges like a red ball of fire, proclaiming another hot day, and all nature seems awake to greet him. Bird life is everywhere, and even the ferns seem sharing the fun as they bow their heads to

the breeze. A startled "joey" (young kangaroo) springs up from the bracken, and a couple of emus, sighting us, flee for dear life to the thickly timbered foot of the ranges; but we are too tired to give chase, much to the disgust of the dogs, who show a refractory desire to follow. From tree to tree brilliant-plumaged parrots are flying, and afar off in the blue ether an eagle hawk is silently cleaving his way, a strong contrast to a line of black cockatoo, with yellow crests on end, shrieking discordantly overhead, and the frivolous laughing jackass, who is heralding the day with his noisy "Ha! ha! ha!" as we pass a patch of timber.

Bit by bit the daylight grows. *Sol lucit omnibus*. He is painting the highest peak of the ranges a soft purple, and kissing the yellow blooms of the dew-laden wattles into a shimmer of gold. No wonder a sulky carrion crow, disturbed over his feast on a dead bullock beneath an isolated box tree, flaps heavily away with a resentful "caw" as our merry cavalcade passes by, and two king parrots, frivolling together as they enjoy an early morning flirtation,

secure from interruption, and apparently, unlike ourselves, undisturbed by the awful odours—"perfumed stink," Dick calls it, as he shakes up the mare—from the above-mentioned carcase, hurry off; a flash of brilliant-plumaged wings, and they are gone!

A keen appreciation of *living* and of God's wonderful handiwork sweeps across me as we ride on. The magpies have ceased their warbling and content themselves with a few sharp notes, their wings and those of the crows the only sombre spot in the wealth of sunlight. Golden-tinted fern leaves rustle at intervals beneath our horses' feet, and the sweet perfume of a wild grass orchid scents the air, a bronze lizard bustling hurriedly away unmindful that his tail is half exposed; while growing in close proximity is the scarlet Sturt pea, which runs along the ground, and over which a radiant dragon fly is poising, his delicate wings shimmering in a thousand prismatic hues as the sunlight touches him.

Everywhere there are signs of the summer. A rope of fuzzy black caterpillars is swaying from a blue gum sapling, and a yel-



low butterfly settles on my saddle flap and then dances away in pursuit of a more sober-winged companion, who is content to be amongst the grasshoppers. The sun is well above us as we reach the home paddock, and a thick blue haze hangs about the foot of the ranges, making us anxious lest another bush fire is endangering our fences the other side of the run.

The overseer is watching with a look of satisfaction the retreating drays already on their way with the load of wool as we ride in the gates, and a couple of swagmen are waiting to ask permission to go to the hut—a permission readily given for a twelve hours' stay, for Dick and I consider it does not amount to our being much out of pocket at the end of the year, and is also diplomatic, for a match or piece of glass spitefully thrown down by a swagman, now that the grass is as dry as tinder, can set a bush fire going in less time than it takes to write it and do untold damage.

The cool night air has given us an appetite, and we thankfully accept some hot pannikins of tea offered us as we pass the hut, old Donald the cook's face

beaming as Dick, in a few tactful words, compliments him on his "brownie" (a sort of cake of flour, raisins, dripping and brown sugar), and then jog on.

A sleepy solemn silence pervades the old blue stone house, broken only by the distant crack of a stock whip and the lowing of some cattle in the yards.

Having dismounted, and given instructions to Jo to skin the game and stretch the skins carefully to dry, we descend to the creek for a refreshing swim before turning in for a sleep in the hammocks and inviting cane chairs on the wide verandah of the creeper-covered bungalow house.

Half an hour later Clarke, whistling his way up to the house—where it is too early for anyone to be stirring—as he swings a bath-towel the size of a blanket, his boyish face beaming with good humour, all unmindful of his late ducking, avers, "It's the jolliest night shoot we have had for ages," a statement which we cordially endorse, as we compliment and thank Dick for his well planned expedition.



MY LAST KANGAROO HUNT





## MY LAST KANGAROO HUNT

The young sun is glinting from over the mountains,  
And gilding the trees with its light :  
The wild birds are drinking their fill at the fountain,  
And chirping their matin delight.  
While soft thro' the forest the zephyrs are sighing,  
And clearing the cool morning air :  
And the kangaroo, scared by the scrub-pigeons flying,  
Is rising alert in his lair.

“Hi, Fred! wake up, you lazy beggar!  
‘Tis time to be off!”

Such are the exclamations that greet me one fine morning towards the middle of December, just as I am about to turn over and indulge in a second sleep; and I find myself, after a violent hustling and shaking, suddenly deposited, *nolens volens*, mattress and all, on the matted floor of my bedroom.

“Hey! What the dickens are you about? Is the run on fire?” I murmur sleepily, rubbing a shin that has come into violent contact with the bedpost.

“Blazing!” says my companion dryly, while I exclaim, “By Jove! is it though?” as I spring to my feet, and rush to the open window. But though I peer in every direction across the stretch of country before

me, not the veriest trace of fire or smoke can I perceive; and I begin to think that I have been basely deceived. Hearing a suspicious chuckle, I turn hastily, and am just in time to see Lindesay's stalwart proportions disappearing from the room, while he laughingly remarks,—

“Don't exert yourself, dear boy; it's only the sun, and the kangaroos are waiting!”

“Confound you!” I retort, as I relieve my injured feelings with a boot, which whizzes down the corridor, and just misses its mark, as Lindesay ducks, turns, and implores me, in a tragic tone (from a safe distance), not to waste my energy on the desert air. So I give him up as incorrigible, and, having gone through ‘tub’ parade, proceed to equip myself for the day (with much grumbling the while at having to leave my comfortable bed at the early hour of 4 a.m.), and struggle into my light buckskins; which, by the way, remind me of the aggrieved young man in *Punch*, who, on visiting his tailor, remarks, in a melancholy tone, “Oh! I say, Snips, these bags are much too tight, you know. Why, I have to get my legs in with a shoehorn!”

Crowning my curly head with a shady pith helmet and 'puggaree,' I finish my toilet by sticking a sheath-knife in my belt; and, taking my 'stock' whip from its rack, hasten to the breakfast-room to refresh the inner man before starting. I find I am last down, and my companions are busily engaged discussing grilled chops and kidneys. My entrance is greeted with many good-natured remarks; and, as I wish my guests 'Good morning,' I shake my fist at Lindesay, and join in the laugh, as I perceive he has been making the most of the comical way he has routed me out of bed.

Having scrambled through a hasty but hearty breakfast, the horses are brought round to the veranda, and, after a careful inspection of girths and bridles, with much unparliamentary language to the somewhat restive horses, we are at last in our saddles, and set off—a merry party of six. Riding together in front, discussing the prospects of the late wool crop, are Darley and Frith, two young squatters from neighbouring stations, who are staying with me for the shearing; next come Hervey and Clarke,



who have come up from Melbourne to spend Christmas with me; a little behind the two latter is Lindesay Pace, my chum and partner, with, sixthly and lastly (as the clergy frequently remark), myself Fred Willis, of Mangaline Station. Bringing up the rear, in the background, is Jo, my general factotum (who accompanies me on all my fishing and hunting excursions), in charge of the dogs, three wiry-looking animals, which belong to the class here termed "kangaroo dogs," but are in reality more like the breed of Scotch deerhounds of the old country than anything I have ever seen. The three above-mentioned go by the names of Ranger, Jumbo, and Bounce, and are my special favourites, for many a good day's sport have I had with them in the Australian bush. Our destination is some low-lying country about fifteen miles away, at the foot of the Victoria Ranges—a favourite feeding-place of the kangaroo and emu.

So we nurse our horses, and jog steadily along out of the "home paddock,"\* and over

\*On a sheep station, the large field surrounding the house of the squatter.

the open plains, where the magpies are warbling an early song in the isolated clumps of gum-trees, and the scattered flocks of sheep fly in all directions as we approach them.

It is a glorious morning. The air, as yet cool and fresh, is sweet with the scent of mimosa and wattle. Old Sol is just showing his golden head over the distant ranges, like a huge ball of fire; and as we enter the dense forest the "laughing jack-asses" herald his advent by bursting forth into their noisy "ha-ha-ha," sending a dissipated old "possum," who has been keeping late hours, scuttling away to his nest in the dark hollow of some ancient gum-tree. As we ride slowly on the silence is broken by the chattering of parrots and parroquets, who utter a protest at our invasion of their solitude.

Overhead, through the spaces of the trees, we catch a glimpse of a cloudless blue sky, while under our feet the cool green ferns spread a picturesque carpet, and here and there the monotony is broken by the bell-like blossoms of the corea and feathery fronds of maidenhair. As we pick

our way, riding in pairs, through the ferns, many of which come up to our horses' flanks, a startled 'joey'\* springs up from the bracken, and hops away in hot haste, never stopping till he has put some distance between us, when he halts, with uplifted paws, and, after a shy glance over his shoulder, is off and away again.

"Hop on, young fellow, your hour is not yet come," says Darley, as we call in the dogs and continue our ride. Some half-an-hour later when nearing our hunting-ground, one of our party dismounts, and creeps quietly forward to within a mile of the ranges, which seem, even at this distance, to tower over us, silent and unfathomable. Some fifteen minutes pass, when at a sign from Frith we ride stealthily forward to join him.

"There's an 'old man' yonder!" he whispers, pointing to a distant clump of gum trees at the foot of the mountain. As we press eagerly forward, one of our party remarks, "By Jove! he is a boomer!" By this time we are well within sight of our game, and as we creep closer and closer the dogs are wild to be off.

\*A young kangaroo.

A fine "old man" kangaroo he is, standing some five feet six, with his tawny grey fur and stately head in bold relief against the dark green background of the mountain, at the foot of which he is quietly grazing, being as yet quite unaware of an enemy in the camp.

When about a hundred yards off he scents us, and, standing upright, with one scornful glance from his glorious brown eyes, is off and away. With a shout of "At him, boys!" the dogs are set on, and we follow in full chase, crashing over the débris of timber and stumps, helter-skelter through the ferns, as we skirt the side of the mountain.

As I sweep on, with now and then an encouraging word to my plucky black horse, I catch a glimpse of the rest of the party. Away to my right are Darley and Clarke, riding hard together, with Frith close up; near me is Hervey; while the rest are scattered a little to my left.

"Yoicks!" Away we go, over a stretch of open country where the flocks of frightened cockatoos fly screeching overhead. Then into a patch of forest, where we



have to ride all we know to avoid the trees, with many a dexterous stoop of the body and sway of the head to escape the overhanging branches. This lasts for about a mile, and and is somewhat trying; but at last it is over, and we emerge into the open, and again set off at a glorious pace across the comparatively clear country.

"Hurrah! boys. What a day we're having!" shouts Lindesay, as he passes me at full gallop, pounding along on his great bay horse.

We have reached a formidable boundary-fence by this time. It is a stiff post and rail; but it is all or nothing, so Frith and Lindesay pull their horses together, and pop over as lightly as if the obstacle were only a low hurdle, while I hold the "Demon's" head hard, and set him at the rasper. We get over somehow; and as the Demon reaches *terra firma*, and I follow my two leaders up the steeply sloping rise on the other side, I have time to glance over my shoulder at the rest of the party.

Darley, I perceive, is down, and his horse is tearing away in the direction of home, while Clarke is using his utmost

persuasive powers to get my favourite mare Brownie over; but the latter, evidently thinking discretion the better part of valour, obstinately refuses to have anything to do with the fence. Hervey is nowhere visible.

On reaching the top of the rise I perceive the kangaroo still going at a tremendous pace, with the dogs well settled to their work. The kangaroo is heading towards a clump of ti-tree fringing the banks of a creek—the former consists of a dense scrub—and my heart sinks, for if the “old man” enters this stronghold it will be all up with our sport.

As I dash down the rise, I debate in my own mind whether it will be better to enter the scrub or follow Lindesay, who is making a *détour*, and skirting the side of it. But there is no time for hesitation, and being close up to the ti-tree I follow Frith's example, and dash into it after the retreating dogs and game. With a crash my horse bounds forward, and, breaking down some saplings, picks his way along one of the many kangaroo tracks (this being evidently one of their favourite drinking-places). A little in advance Frith

is doing likewise.

"Look out! Snake!" he shouts, as we ride on; and a large black snake darts across the path and into the creek, along the banks of which we are riding. As I glance back I see the ugly brute, whose head is just visible, swimming rapidly across the narrow bit of water. On we go, somewhat slowly, through the ti-tree for about a mile, till we come to another open bit of country.

"There he goes! Come on, old boy!" shouts Frith; and we again put spurs to our horses, and try to make up for lost time as we urge them on.

In the distance, disappearing over a rise, we can see the kangaroo, with the dogs well up, and Lindesay some hundred yards in rear. The kangaroo is going somewhat unsteadily, for evidently the pace is telling, and the dogs are gaining. But, truly, he is a grand old fellow. Away we go in full chase across the now somewhat stony country, avoiding the rocky, lichen-covered boulders, on one of which a huge green lizard 'lies a-basking in the sun.' Off we race, at headlong speed, down the slope, and

over the rising hill, sending the startled wallaby hopping away in all directions.

"He's nearly done, and so am I!" pants Frith, as together we clear a fallen gum tree.

True enough, as we reach the top of the rise we see the kangaroo, with the dogs well up, and almost upon him, for he is nearly spent. As we dash down the hill after Lindesay's retreating figure, the "old man" again comes up with the creek; it is evidently rather a deep corner, and the kangaroo hesitates for a second, and is lost. In an instant the dogs are up with him, and he turns and stands at bay, while they spring at his throat, sending the fur flying in all directions. With one stroke of his powerful hind foot he fells Ranger to the ground, and the latter falls back with one piercing yelp, his body ripped up from end to end.

The other dogs hang back for a second, and Lindesay, arriving on the scene, hastily dismounts, and, cutting in behind the kangaroo, with a well-aimed thrust from his powerful knife despatches him, and the "old man" rolls over dead!



"Hurrah! a glorious run!" we shout, as Frith and I, riding up, dismount, and ease the girths of our reeking horses.

"Well done, Lindesay! he is a boomer!" I remark, as I run past the dead beast to look at Ranger, who is dying fast.

"Poor old fellow! It has been a sad day for you," I say, bending over the faithful old hound, who even as I do so gives one last lick at my hand, and with a piteous moan lies dead at my feet.

"Ah, well! he has gone to the happy hunting-ground now!" I think, as I turn hastily away, and with a long-drawn sigh of regret busy myself with the horses.

Lindesay and Frith are hard at work skinning the kangaroo, and having finished and cut off his tail (the latter will make excellent soup for our dinner to-night) and thrown the carcass to the dogs, we tie up our horses, and, loading our pipes, prepare to enjoy a well-earned repose under the shade of a large shey-oak tree. For the sun is high in the heavens by this time, and old Sol is pouring down his relentless rays over the plain, and we are glad enough to get into the shade and rest after our

hard riding. As we lie on the cool grass, and contemplate the ranges which rise up before us, enveloped in a soft blue mantle of haze, and which, judging by their appearance, are some ten miles distant, we discuss the late events of the hunt, and all agree that it has been a capital day's sport.

After an hour's rest we call up the dogs, and with a farewell look at poor Ranger we proceed on our homeward journey. As we jog slowly on we stop at intervals to sweep the surrounding country in search of the rest of our party, but for some time can find no trace of them.

"Hark! there goes a coo-ee," says Frith at last, his sharp ears having caught a faint sound in the distance; and putting his hands to his mouth, he sends a ringing "coo-ee" echoing through the great forest, waking the (for once) quiet parrots and cockatoos, who are indulging in a mid-day *siesta*, and sending them chattering and screeching away over our heads.

"Coo-ee—coo-ee!" answers a voice in the distance, and the sounds get louder and louder, till our companions appear in sight

and join us. As we ride homewards together we relate how we finished our run, and our comrades evince much disgust at not having been in at the death.

“Jo” is much distressed at the loss of my (and his) favourite dog, and I give orders that two of the men are to go out in the cool of the evening and bury the poor brute. Clarke and Darley, it appears, have been companions in misfortune ever since we passed the boundary-fence, and Hervey came to grief early in the day with a broken girth.

As we cross the home paddock, and come in sight of the cool-looking bungalow house, I for one feel not a little relieved to be within reach of cool quarters, with an early prospect of a “tub” and (shall I confess it?) iced drinks.

So ends my last hunt (December, 1886) at the Victoria ranges.

**"'POSSUMMING UNDER THE  
SOUTHERN CROSS"**





## “POSSUMMING UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS”

Above in dark blue ether, 'neath the beautiful Southern Cross,  
The plover and black swan are circling, as our horses sink knee  
deep in moss,  
And the still night air is heavy with the scent of wattle and musk,  
And fill'd with mysterious murmurs of the things which creep  
forth at dusk.

“Look here, Dick! what about that 'possum hunt you promised me? I've been down to the yards, and the Overseer tells me the moon will be full by ten,” and L'Estrange, our English guest, pauses to look round him impatiently, his only answer as he stands irresolute being a luxurious snore, or a somnolent grunt from sundry recumbent figures.

“Well, I'm blowed! Of all the lazy beggars,” I hear him murmur, as feigning slumber I watch his provokingly cool person out of the tail of an eye, and marvel at the energy that not even a thermometer at ninety in the shade can daunt, for L'Estrange's interest in things pertaining to bush sport is insatiable, all a novelty as it is to him; while his appreciation of station

life has won for him the hearts of all on the place, from old Donald, the men's cook at the hut (of whose \* "Brownie" L'Estrange is loud in his praises), to Bridget our own factotum at the home station, who utterly refuses to believe that so "foine a gintleman" can hail from anywhere but her own beloved kingdom of Kildare.

It is the end of a "hot wind" day. Since early morning a fierce North wind has been blowing, a regular scorcher has been raging so fiercely that even Dick (my brother and partner) and I have succumbed, and, with one or two men who came over last night from adjoining stations for the muster, and who have been with us in the saddle since day-break, are now indulging before dinner (after a dip in the creek), in a well earned rest on sundry bamboo chairs and hammocks, slung to a nicety to catch every breath of air on the wide creeper-covered verandah of Bolwirra station, situated in the Western District of Victoria, Australia.

A sweltering day verily has it been; a day in which all Nature has been asleep,

\* A sort of plain cake made at the hut.

and in which all things awake have pantingly yearned for a change and the going down of the sun.

Now, as a baby wind born of the night creeps up from the South, the blessed change is apparent, and a few signs of life begin to assert themselves as the magpies call to their mates perkily in the tall red gum trees of the home paddock, and the crows go cawing off in search of the garbage beloved by them, in the shape of an unfortunate bullock or sheep which has succumbed to the heat away out on the run.

The soft lowing of the cattle in the yards—"scrubbers"—mostly ready for branding at daybreak to-morrow, every now and again comes in a muffled roar, such a contrast to the gay chirrups of the locusts which day and night ring out shrilly and unceasingly in the willows, which fringe the creek at the foot of the gardens.

Away across the paddocks with their isolated shey oaks amongst the gum trees, loom the ranges from out a mist of blue haze, the latter a legacy from a distant bush fire, the other side of the run, which has been growing nearer our new boundary all



day and disturbing our peace of mind.

It hangs like a curtain, a pale soft blue deepening to a glorious purple, making the tallest peak stand out as a sentinel, solemn and majestic in its beauty.

Now that the wind has changed our anxiety has lessened, for it will blow the sparks from us, a dispensation for which we are devoutly thankful, for there is nothing that a landowner dreads more than a raging bush fire, devastating as it does all before it, leaving a country without a trace of any of its growing trees or greenery, only a mournful spectacle of its ravages in the charred remnants of the grand old forest gums, often in a single day the labour of years in fencing being swept away.

In the paddock below the sloping gardens I can see one of the station hands bringing in the "milkers," the crack of his stockwhip ringing out on the still evening air—a thing resented by his mount, which is pig-jumping and bucking as only a half broken Australian mare can, for which little diversion I am secretly a bit thankful, for it has arrested L'Estrange's attention from ourselves, as

he leans against one of the creeper-covered verandah posts, lost for awhile in admiration at the splendid bit of horsemanship before us, as Alec the stockrider, sitting loosely in the saddle (and all unconscious of an audience), by a bit of clever riding frustrates the mare's demoniacal intention of crushing him against a "stringy bark" in the paddock.

I turn over and settle down for another half hour's siesta, in an atmosphere sweet with a hundred subtle perfumes; the magnolia and starlike blossoms of the Cape jessamine dominating all, though the scent from a myriad blooms is wafted towards me through the swaying *Dolycus* creeper, as if the very flowers were giving thanks to God for the cool change after the hottest day of a hot Australian summer, while old Sol goes down behind the mountain, like a red ball of fire touching the hill tops with a glint of his glory, and presaging another hot day to-morrow before he sinks into his shroud of night.

But my peace is short-lived.

Long before Alec the stockman has finished his tussel with the mare and has

rounded the corner of the house with the milkers,—old Billy the huge bull trotting contentedly beside his wives—one of our fellows who has been deeply absorbed in the pages of "The Field," just out by the mail, begins in a drowsy voice,

"I say, who said 'possums'?" It is little Murray, who rising up after a prolonged yawn—which is enough to rend him in twain—scenting something to kill, begins slowly and with malice intent to get out of his hammock.

No more peace lies our way. A fact I realise as inevitable, as the two energetic spirits go round, bent on rousing the party and pursuing successfully their campaign as they steal about tipping up hammocks, upsetting chairs, causing chaos where so lately peace reigned, till a regular bear fight ensues, as we retaliate with whatever comes handy, and for a time cushions, books and slippers rain heavily.

Round and round we skirmish, more than one taking a header off the verandah into the shrubs and flower beds below, but coming up with renewed vigour and war-whoop, which is too much for even my

game little fox-terriers; dauntless spirits both, but which now beat a hasty retreat beneath a heavy carved wood sofa, while Maria—the cockatoo—a respectable old maid who disapproves of such levity, scuttles away with dignity, and a scandalised air, followed by my tame magpies, two giddy young things, which think the end of the world has come, all three retiring precipitately while all feathers are intact, to the highest part of the creepers, from which point of vantage they utter protesting and earsplitting shrieks sending a greedy family of ground parrakeets—*Pezophorus formosus*—which have been making hay amongst the loquats in the giant tree at the foot of the garden—off in hot haste.

I hear indignant squeaks and chuckles from the trio long after the fray is over, and we have adjourned peaceably to the gun room—a comfortable apartment with matted floor and cane lounges—off the verandah, and filled with a conspicuous and heterogeneous collection of trophies of our guns, amongst which a collection of dried snake skins hanging from a nail, and various animals fearfully and wonderfully stuffed



by Lindesay in the winter evenings, adorn the walls.

A consumptive bandicoot, minus a leg, and a moth-eaten native cat, gaze at me reproachfully with glassy eyes, from brackets, as I sit at a table stamping wads, and the business of getting ready for our night's opossum shooting, away over at the Black Forest, proceeds amid a businesslike silence, as others of our party measure powder and fill cartridges, and for an hour we smoke the pipe of peace till the dinner bell rings.

Two hours later we assemble on the back verandah for a start; four of us driving in the buggies with two of the station "hands" on the back seats to carry the sacks for the "'possums," the rest of us riding.

Jumbo, Alice and Fly are speedily loosed from their kennels at the foot of the gum trees (three of our best kangaroo hounds), and we are soon off, a merry party of seven, the cheery voices ringing out on the still night air, as the dogs rush about like demons let loose, with the twinkling stars above us, old Sirius the Dog star

more brilliant than any, as he guards the beautiful Southern Cross, refusing to be dimmed by even the radiant moon, which in a world of white lustre is bathing the sun-dried paddocks in a wealth of silver light.

Through the home paddock and out of the first gates, past the blue stone wool-shed, and the Overseer's house, by the cattle-yards where at last the beasts are silent, by the men's huts, looking lonely, for the lights are out, all hands tired out, having turned in after the early morning's work of the muster; through the lower slip panels, near by which a group of wattles (a species of mimosa) golden crowned, is filling the air with fragrance, that perfume which is never forgotten by one who has lived up country in Australia and which has come to him in the spring time of life, perhaps in the early morning, when the dew laden blooms are sun-kissed into a shimmer of gold, or may be as now, in a mystical light, when a pale white Austral moon is flooding the paddocks, making all things desirable, softening the hard lines of the gaunt old eucalyptus trees with their strips of bleached

bark flapping ghostlike, and their fantastic shapes seared and distorted by the droughts, hot winds and fierce bush fires of centuries, as their boughs, cast weird and misty shadows on the turf, looking more human than tree like.

As we leave the Homestead behind us, the flocks of newly shorn sheep scamper off, and a group of hysterical steers, full of the arrogance of youth, go stampeding away and are lost to sight in the short scrub and young blue gums, which spring up thickly on a rocky piece of ground.

We have not gone far before a discussion takes place as to the merits of our respective pairs of chestnut ponies.

Now Adam and Eve are the joy and pride of my life ; small wonder, considering the miles of country we traverse, the pair doing their sixteen miles an hour on a good road with ease, and beating all competitors at the local shows, as the rows of cups and prizes in my possession can testify.

To hear them compared to slow old Possum and Dixie is not to be tolerated, and to save their reputation, L'Estrange

being sceptical as to the above pace, I suggest a trial of speed out here in the open country; a suggestion speedily agreed to.

"All right, forrard away, and look out for the wombat holes," Lindesay shouts back, as with a touch of the whip and a chirrup, my favourite pair are off.

"Sit tight," I say quickly to my companion, between my shut teeth, a timely warning, for as we set off on our mad race, rattling over sticks and stones, the bumps are a caution!

Yoicks! Away we trot smartly over the open grass paddocks, my attention strained to the utmost to avoid the stumps, fallen timber and isolated trees, with the stars—God's forget-me-nots—shining above us in the dusky blue skies; dodging the timber and missing logs by the eighth of an inch, the brushwood crackling under the light wheels; avoiding the "crab holes" as best we can, all danger forgotten in the exquisite delirium of pace, with the riders cheering us on, and the dew-laden air rushing sweet in our faces, all danger forgotten, while the spirit of joyous motion



enters our souls as we rush through space.

Everything flees before us. The various night animals, out for a midnight ramble, retire in a hurry; a huge carpet snake—*hoplocephalus-curtus*—glides away with hurried and sinuous motion to his home in a hollow log, where the moonlight touches his mottled back no more, and I feel a keen regret that he has escaped us, for since I lost my favourite terrier from snake bite a year ago when out with me after snipe, I seldom allow one of these reptiles to escape, and poor Pepper has been often avenged.

On we go at a rattling pace, through the horse paddock, where the animals turned out flee before us like mad things, while the riders hurry on to let down the slip rails, and I see Murray, riding reckless on the roan, clear the brush fence with a bound, as he and Lin do a race on their own.

"Steady does it!" L'Estrange murmurs as we glide through the gateway and into a patch of ti-tree, then by the side of the reedy lagoon, where the water-fowl are having a good time, for the swamps are not dry this season, our wheels sending the soft black mud flying in all directions and causing

a panic amongst the water things.

A musk rat darts away, followed by a gay old bull-frog who is serenading his wives on a reed and who disappears in the midst of a solemn "Pomp! Pomp!" astonishing a family of juvenile wild ducks—absurd little fluffy balls of down, all tail and no body—which are playing hide-and-seek with a moon-beam which, like a little inquisitive fairy, has stolen in between the reeds and is lying asleep on the water; the young ducks have been basely deserted by their parents, which have dived at our approach, so they make a virtue of necessity and follow a matronly moorhen, which is bustling away into obscurity amongst the rushes.

Overhead the black swan—*cygnus atratus*—flap heavily away, and the curlew are calling with their long, wailing, echoing cry, like a lost soul from another world seeking its mate.

Over the water the plover are skirling and the grating cries of some native companions,\* which are stalking afar off the other side of the Lagoon, like a ghostly regiment of soldiers, float harshly out on the night air,

\*Hérons.

while above us a line of wild duck are playing "Follow my leader" beneath the starlit heavens.

"Sit tight! Hold on!" I say again warningly, as we cross a bit of country which an unfortunate "cockatoo settler" has been vainly trying to drain. Bump! Bump! We go safely over a deeper ditch than the rest, but this time my warning is unnecessary, for L'Estrange, his boyish face full of satisfaction at our midnight race across country, has long ago realised that discretion is the better part of valour, and is holding on to his gun and the side of the buggy like grim death.

The ponies have long ago vindicated their reputation and have left the other buggy far behind, the steady beat of their hoofs falling noiselessly on the soft grass as we fly along.

Nearing our destination, I steady the pair and we draw up on the outskirts of the forest, the men unharnessing my favourites and securing them to a log fence, after a rub down, and we, while awaiting the other buggy, get out guns and ammunition and prepare for a start.

We have not long to wait, and when the

others arrive, MacDonald, who is driving, comes in for a good deal of good-natured chaff.

"By Jove! They're a pair of beauties," L'Estrange says, as whistling the dogs we pass the now quietly grazing ponies, the "hands" following with the sacks, and skirting the edge of the forest, prepare for—'Possums!

This species is quite distinct to the so-called American "coon" and varies again from the true Tasmanian opossum, which has a dark brown beautiful soft fur.

I must confess it has always been something of an enigma to me that the birds and animals in a warm climate like this should be covered with thick plumage and fur, though of course the nights are cold enough. But take for instance the birds: parrots, all the cockatoo tribe, emus, swans, wild geese, all covered with the closest of feathers; and among the animals: kangaroos, opossums, platypus, native bears, and others too numerous to mention, all coated with the thickest of warm furs. But I digress.

We have not proceeded far, though the first few trees are tenantless, before the



dogs rush wildly to the foot of a huge red gum, scratching and leaping upwards at the bark, uttering excited whines and yelps. It is our first find, though it takes a little patience to discover him.

Getting the tree well between us and the moon, Lindesay's sharp eyes discern him; still as a mouse he crouches on a branch, looking to the untrained eye a mere excrescence on the bark. But his tactics avail him nothing, and we stand back, and pointing him out give L'Estrange a chance for his first shot; and as the gun rings, out not a little to his astonishment there is above a wild clutching at the bark and the small animal—a fine specimen with a thick coating of woolly grey fur—falls with a thud at our feet, dead, while the men make a timely rescue from the dogs, putting the opossum into a sack.

We move on to another likely spot, the dogs leading us unerringly, though more than one little animal escapes by hiding in a hollow trunk, and every now and again as one drops and makes for another tree, there is a wild scamper of men and dogs over the grass, and an occasional

header over the brushwood lying thickly under the trees.

Bit by bit we work the edge of the forest, till the sacks grow heavy and even the excitement of the dogs begins to cool.

A mob of bullocks, attracted by the shots, comes gradually near; noisier and noisier they grow, till their bellowing becomes a nuisance. Pandemonium let loose is a joke to it, and we disperse them with a shot and a wild hurroosh, and like things possessed they go crashing into the forest and disappear among the trees, startling the sleepy birds, and sending a bronze wing pigeon flapping away.

Half way across the forest we divide, some of our fellows returning to help the men to carry the heavy sacks, who have orders to bring my buggy round to meet us the other side of the timber, while the rest of us go steadily on.

Then an hour later, as the moon is waning, we cease shooting and make for the rendezvous, a group of lichen-covered boulders near the creek, and throwing ourselves down take out our pipes and prepare for a well earned rest.

As the cool tobacco smoke curls upwards, I fall to watching and listening to the sights and sounds of the night, and I find myself marvelling at God's wonderful handiwork, as the awful loneliness of the forest is disturbed by the vast army of mighty atoms at work; as queer rustlings and chirpings make themselves felt above the whisper of leaves.

A shy native bear peeps down from a tree top, and, spying us, retires in a hurry; and a kangaroo hops out of the ti-tree, with a steady thump, thump, through the timber, a ghostly figure in the dusky light, with all the dignity of and instinct with the self preservation of maternity, for as she half turns I see a joey (young kangaroo) peeping out of her pouch, a sharp-nosed, inquisitive little thing, as yet too innocent to be trusted alone in the world.

The mosquitos buzz round, bothering us a little, and causing uneasiness to the beautiful praying mantis, which is lifting up its slender green arms as if in supplication on a twig near me; contrasting strangely in his quietude with the self-assertive bronze beetle which is bumping and booming round

us, sending a belated caterpillar home to bed in a hurry.

The tall gums cast misty shadows as the night wind stirs and rustles their papery leaves, and sends a melancholy sough through the branches of a shey oak.

Who has not felt at night a weird stillness in an Australian forest? And as I listened for the wheels of the buggy a great wonder comes to me at the vastness of it all, while a flying 'possum wings gracefully by, and the ghostly cry of a mopoke (night jar) sounds like some demon let loose in the forest.

"Mopoke! Mopoke!" wails out and re-echoes through the timber, and a bat goes whirring away.

Overhead the tranquil skies grow dusky, though still starlit, as the moon sinks, and the tall gums become shadowy, their knotted branches reaching out like some wraith, beckoning with gigantic waving arms. All sorts of queer shapes are theirs, looking uncanny in the half light.

In the distance I can see the men with the buggy watering the ponies at the creek.



Steadily but surely, as if reluctant, the pale dawn appears and the sun creeps up, gilding the trees on the sloping sides of the ranges, and kissing the blooms of the wattles near us into a pale gold; and presently with sleepy cheeps and a rustling of wings the birds awake, as the clusters of stars grow dim and disappear, as all Nature hurries to welcome the sun. Whiffs of wild honey fill the air—welcome addition always to our breakfast table on the station—the latter telling us the bees have a home in a tree near by.

As the buggy rattles up the spell is broken, and rising with a comforting stretch, we store guns and cartridges under the seats, and set off on our homeward journey.

Crossing the creek, and through a belt of ti-tree, out into the open country, past an outlying shepherd's hut, where it is too early for Jo to be stirring, and across a patch of thistle country, stony and barren, but where ephemeral butterflies in rainbow colours are frivolling; then out over a piece of sandy heath country, a glorious patch of colour, where the ground is somewhat treacherous with wombat holes.

Gay dragon flies are having it all their own way, and a flight of cockatoos (*cacatua cristatus*) are screeching above us, followed by a sparrow-hawk (*accipiter nisus*) darting swiftly, on the look-out for prey, and causing dire consternation to two tiny blue-tits—exquisite lovers these—which are swinging together on a frond of maidenhair fern, which has peeped out to see the world from under a clump of bracken, and causing a lark which afar off in the infinity of space above us, has been trilling out his thanks to his Maker, to float down silently, swiftly, like a little brown leaf, to safety on a dog-leg fence beside us.

On we go, leaving the heath behind us, and a lazy iguana, the sole bit of animal life visible, in possession; now into the sunlit paddocks, where the magpies are warbling merrily, with seemingly ironical chuckles at the crows, which are feasting noisily over a dead sheep, knowing that they will presently have to give way to the eagle which I perceive soaring not far off.

As the wheels glide silently over the soft sward, where sweet mauve orchids lift their slender heads and scent the dew-laden

grasses, a brush turkey rises heavily from out the branches of a fallen tree.

'Tis the work of a moment to pull the ponies on to their haunches and secure this welcome addition to our larder, and as the shot rings out he is secured by Alec, whose appearance when he runs forward upsets an interesting flirtation, as a couple of Rosella parrots rise from the grass.

A shimmer of brilliant plumaged wings and an angry protest from a family of budgerygahs\* in the vicinity, and they are gone as we turn into the home paddock, and I can see the station roofs glistening in the sun.

It is a glorious morning, as we draw up at the stockyards, where all hands are busily engaged "branding,"—a cheery scene, full of bustle, with the businesslike stock-whips ringing out, and a running clatter of hoofs as a refractory steer refuses to be brought for the branding irons, causing the men an exciting ten minutes, as the beast narrowly escapes annihilating one of our best stockmen, who is wheeling after him in the yards.

\*Love birds—*Psittaculla-sunderiana*.

Many a cheery " Good morning, sir ! " greets me as they rattle after him inside the fence, and the Overseer comes forward for some instructions for the day. But the unwilling victim is caught at last, and relieves his feelings by a sullen roar, and once more we drive on to the house, where a refreshing cup of tea awaits us before we turn in for an hour's rest, well satisfied with out night's 'Possum hunt at the Black Forest.





EMU HUNTING AT COREENA



## EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

Aloft in the branches with discordant screaming,  
The parrots salute the new day:  
Above, in the ether its ruddy wings gleaming,  
An eagle is cleaving his way.  
Below, in the fern, the lyre birds' singing  
Is echoing over the land;  
And thro' all its recesses the forest is ringing  
With wild life on every hand.

"Woa! Steady now, Sunlight! No bucking," I murmur soothingly, having succeeded (after great exertion) in swinging myself into the saddle—a difficult feat which I have been vainly trying to accomplish for the last five minutes.

Sunlight is a superb piece of horseflesh, standing something over Seventeen hands, colour dark brown, with lean head and tan muzzle, possessing shoulders and quarters fit to lift him over anything, the perfection of a weight-carrier once off, when "Lucifer flying from Hades" is as nothing to the way Sunlight covers the ground, but alas! he is just a little bit difficult on starting.

"I say, you fellows! Do hurry up! What a time you are!" I exclaim impatiently between my teeth, getting my sentences



## 80 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

out in a series of undignified jerks, and having bitten my tongue horribly in my endeavours to persuade the afore-mentioned animal to go upon four legs instead of two, a mode of support he appears particularly averse from, judging by the antics he is indulging in at the present moment, that include frequent and vicious lashes out in all directions, which, occurring as they do at unexpected moments, are not calculated to sooth one's feelings ("pig-jumping"—with a buck thrown in at intervals); and when Sunlight goes in for this little diversion, he does it with an energy that tries my patience and my seat, unimpeachable as I know the latter to be; for ten years' experience of hard riding on the station has given me a pretty idea of the art of sticking on—including as it has a mount on every description of "cattle" under the sun.

This morning Sunlight's behaviour is, if anything, a trifle more unseemly than usual, and as I wait for my companions, being first in the saddle, an awful foreboding comes to me to the effect that if we do not take our departure speedily, my snowy

buckskins will make an undesired acquaintance with Mother Earth.

"All right, old boy! We shall soon be ready now," a voice makes reply to my agonised appeal; the tones are necessarily somewhat muffled as the speaker is vigorously employed in tightening a girth with his head supporting a saddle flap. On the verandah Coldham (who came over last night with Winter from the neighbouring station of Willura for a day's hunting) is initiating Neville into the mystery of putting a fresh cracker to his stock-whip successfully, while through the open French window, I catch a glimpse of Kit Musgrave—my *fidus Achates* and partner in Coreena—struggling through a hasty breakfast, late as usual; for Kit has a rooted antipathy to turning out with the sun. He has a supreme contempt for the early bird theory, so it generally requires a liberal bestowal of "cold pig" to induce him to leave his bed before 6 a.m.

'Come on, Winter! Let us be off,' I exclaim, seeing that he has at last finished the arrangement of girth satisfactorily, and not a little relieved at the prospect of a

start. I whistle the dogs—two game-looking kangaroo hounds, named respectively Nellie and Smut—and we give our horses a breather across the “home-paddock”\* to the lower slip panels, where we halt and wait for our companions. A hundred yards off are the men’s quarters—a neat row of stone cottages, where an animated scene is going on, and the cook is having a busy time in providing breakfast for some sixteen hands, for shearing is in full swing on the station, and I am greeted with many a cheery “Good morning, sir,” as I ride forward for a few minutes’ chat with the overseer, and then rejoin Winter at the slip rails and wait for the other fellows, who are still at the starting-point. Coldham and Musgrave I perceive are mounted, but Neville (who is a “new chum,” having only arrived from England two months ago) appears to be experiencing a little of the trouble I have just gone through.

After many attempts he is at last in the saddle, and as the trio come towards us, I see that Musgrave is offering sundry dry judicious cautions with regard to keeping

\* The field surrounding the squatter’s house or homestead.

the mare's head up—a piece of advice which Neville receives with a demeanour very suggestive of “teaching your grandmother.” As he reaches us he carelessly loosens the reins and laughingly remarks with his usual *bonhomie*, which has made him a universal favourite since he came out to the Antipodes:

“I say, Lindesay, what a confounded hurry you are in this morning!”

The words are hardly out of his mouth before there is a scuffle. I catch a glimpse of a rounded back, a flourish of arms and legs in the air—and then chaos, while amid general commotion Neville lands on all fours a few yards distant.

“What the Dickens has come to the horses?” I murmur, as he picks himself up with a rueful face, fortunately with all bones intact, but the pristine freshness of his snowy cords alas! no more. A few minutes ago they were spotless and sets one pondering on the spotless get up of a new chum. Now they are a mournful spectacle, but Neville good-naturedly joins in the laugh against himself as he scrambles to his feet, and



## 84 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

we watch two of the station hands with Musgrave who has gone to the rescue, tearing wildly round the home paddock in pursuit of my favourite mare who is behaving in anything but a ladylike manner, and is showing her temper and her heels at the same time. A good five minutes pass before she is recaptured, with infinite caution Neville again mounts, and we set off without further delay.

Our object to-day is an emu hunt, and our destination a certain mountain called Napur, about twelve miles from the homestead at the foot of which we have started on not a few capital runs, for the base of the mountain forms a chosen feeding-spot of the emu and kangaroo, owing no doubt to the fresh green herbage which flourishes at the foot of it.

It is one of fair Austral's fairest mornings. Afar off from over the mountain the young sun is glinting and gilding the trees with its light, while the whole air resounds with the cries of newly awakened birds, mingling with the baaing and bleating of scattered flocks of sheep, which regard us with alarmed eyes as we ride on in pairs at a slow pace

across the plains where we sometimes come out after wombats on fine nights; past the river, another well-known spot which affords good sport in the way of platypus—*ornithorincus paradoxus*—shooting by moonlight. As we ride by, a startled brood of wild ducks, which are disporting amongst the new-born sunbeams slowly creeping over the water, disappear amongst the reeds, and with a whirr-r-r innumerable wild fowl fly shrieking away, their various cries mingling with a deep-toned chorus of bull-frogs, and the harsh grating notes from a group of native companions\* which stalk away to our rear. A long line of black swans sails majestically overhead, their dark forms clearly outlined against the rich blue fathomless expanse stretching far above us, unbroken as far as the eye can reach save where one fleecy cloudlet—an exquisite thing—hangs motionless in the far off ether.

About a mile past the big lagoon, our path takes us through a dense forest where the track necessitates a scattering of our party, so close is the timber. Here and there a startled opossum beats a hasty

\* Tall birds resembling cranes.

## 86 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

retreat as we come into view, and the laughing jackasses burst forth into such a noisy chorus of ha! ha! ha's! as to give one the impression that the forest is the abode of a whole tribe of cachinnatory demons.

"What a horrid row. Pandemonium is a joke in comparison," exclaims Neville laughingly, as he gives vent to such a "who-whoop" as causes our horses to jump again, induces the mare to resume her tactics of the morning, and starts sundry families of new-born parrots—pink-skinned, naked little creatures (as yet too unclad to go out into the world), to lift up their voices and swell the chorus with their alarmed screeches from their nests in the giant trees.

The noise is terrific—small wonder that a frightened hare imagines his last hour has come, and scuttles away through the brushwood in hot haste with his bushy tail showing at intervals through the ferns (masses of which grow on all sides) as the ha! ha! ha! hoo! hoo! hoo! breaks out afresh. It is a veritable Bedlam let loose, and we are thankful enough to leave the forest and emerge into the open.

On the edge of the timber we come upon a pair of soft-eyed rock wallabies indulging in their early morning breakfast with a luxuriant absence of all haste that betokens a security from interruptions in their feeding-place. The snap of a twig beneath the horses' feet startles them, and sends the pair hastening away into the forest, where they are soon lost to view.

We are nearing our destination by this time, and Mount Napur, looming before us from out a mist of blue haze—the remains of yesterday's bush fires—appears only a few yards distant, but in reality there is at least half a mile between us and the mountain. As yet we have seen no trace of emus, though a fine "old man"\* has come into view, and is quietly feeding about two hundred yards distant.

"What a glorious fellow!" Coldham murmurs involuntarily as we rein in our horses. Quietly as he speaks it is enough. The kangaroo is on the alert *instantly*. Raising himself to his full height, which cannot measure less than five feet six, he stands erect, evidently scenting mischief.

\* Black fellows' expression for big kangaroo.



## 88 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

Before another minute passes, he has spied us with his sharp brown eyes, and is hastening away to the east in the direction of the forest.

"Come here, sir! Back Nellie!" I shout authoritatively as the dogs spring forward, and it is as much as we can do to restrain them from following the fast flying grey figure speeding away to our left. Thump! thump! we can hear his great tail coming in contact with the earth, and as we watch him Neville says regretfully:

"What an awful pity we do not follow!" It does seem a temptation hard to resist, but Musgrave, who is commander-in-chief on this occasion, declares that we have come out for emus, therefore emus, and nothing else, are to be the order of the day.

So we again set off, and jog steadily on towards the mountain, one and all keeping a sharp look-out. The merry badinage and conversation which has accompanied us up to this point is at an end, for we are near our hunting-ground, and all on the alert. A few moments pass, then an excited ejaculation from Winter brings us to a halt.

"I see one! Look! To the right of the shey oak!" he exclaims, indicating the spot with the handle of his whip.

"Two. By Jove!" returns Neville.

There sure enough are two stately grey objects moving slowly over the grass. They are within a few feet of each other, and are evidently male and female. There is a moment's silence. A hasty, if important, looking to girths and bridles, and then silently we follow Musgrave, who is riding a little in advance. Nearer and nearer we creep, exercising great caution to prevent any sound reaching the birds, for it is a great object to get as near them as possible, an emu once started being a match for any horse. When we are about a hundred yards distant the bird on the near side discovers our proximity. He stops suddenly; the succulent morsels no longer engage his attention, then as he cranes his long neck from side to side, and grasps the fact that an enemy is in his camp, breaks into a smart trot, with a warning grunt to his wife, who promptly follows her lord and master.

The important moment has come! It is

the signal for a general start and now the hunt begins as the dogs bound off, cheered on by an exciting shout of "After him, boys! Forward!" from Musgrave, while we follow in full chase.

Away we go helter-skelter through the timber and brushwood. Coldham and Winter ride close up under the mountain to head the game away from it, and prevent any possibility of the birds entering the trees, which are very thick on the sloping base of Mount Napur; a little to the right is Musgrave taking everything in his way; stumps, fallen timber, and some of the gigantic trunks are no joke, but nothing comes amiss to Kit, and however big the obstacle he invariably scorns the idea of a *detour*.

He is to-day mounted on a wiry grey animal more useful than ornamental, and is sailing along with a steady sweeping stride which threatens to leave us all out of the race should the latter prove a long one; for in spite of reckless riding he seldom comes to grief.

Hurrah! Off we go at a cracking pace across the home paddock—which comprises

some four hundred acres—and out on the open plains, startling the vast number of crows which here and there are feasting noisily over a dead sheep—mournful evidence of the late drought—past the solitary gums and shey oaks dotted over the plains where magpies and minahs are warbling a welcome to the sun.

“It’s glorious fun,” shouts Neville, with his hat stuck on the back of his head, and his handsome boyish face all aglow with excitement as together we clear a fallen gum tree and race on side by side; for Sunlight is, as usual, atoning for his misbehaviour of the morning, and the mare is making splendid running with her light weight, Neville just turning the scale at ten stone.

Glorious, indeed, it is with the fresh morning air blowing cool in our faces, filled with a sweet subtle scent of mimosa, wafted to us from that distant clump of golden crowned wattles, which stand out distinct and clear in the form of a dark green patch on the yellow, sunbaked plains. A mile or so beyond this the country becomes somewhat uneven, and the ground



—strewn as it is with huge lichen-covered boulders and innumerable “crab-holes,” makes the pace somewhat slower and the going a little risky. As I pass one of these moss-grown rocks my horse snorts wildly, and swerves so much to the right as nearly to send me over his head; and glancing down I see a large iguana open his jaws with a snap and disappear beneath the stone.

The emus keep pretty well together and are striding along at a tremendous pace. We have left the mountain some distance behind us by this time, and four of our party have successfully negotiated two brush fences possessing gaps which formed a loophole of escape for the birds, though one of the horses I notice is absent.

As I reach the top of a ridge, I am just in time to witness the downfall of another of our party, as Coldham's horse puts his foot into one of the treacherous crab-holes and comes to earth with a crash.

It is a regular “crumpler,” I involuntarily slacken speed, and am not a little relieved to see Coldham scramble to his feet, and

start in pursuit of his "quad," which is making tracks in the direction of home.

"All right! Go on," he shouts; and, nothing loth, I gallop after the others. Uphill and down dale we sweep, with pulses throbbing and souls filled with that exquisite delirium of pace that anyone who has experienced a quick thing across country will understand the meaning of. Afar off a formidable obstacle looms before us in the shape of a stiff post and rail, and for an instant I imagine, as we near it, that it will baffle the birds. But no; not a bit of it. Edging off to the right, they head back, keeping well away still from the dogs, and make for a distant forest. This little manœuvre places me foremost in the van, and, as an excited shout of "Keep them out of the timber, Lindesay!" reaches me, I turn Sunlight sharp to the right and ride all I know to intercept the emus before they reach the forest.

But I do not gain my object. The birds are too quick for me; so there is nothing for it but to follow in through the timber into the gloom of the forest, where the lank gumtrees—*eucalyptus Amygdalina*

—towering to some hundreds of feet, appear to have formed a conspiracy to shut out every peep of heaven's blue. On we go between the trees, keeping a vigilant look-out for overhanging branches which sweep down from the sturdy red gums, and threaten us with Absalom's fate, should we neglect to throw ourselves flat in the saddle. The forest lasts for about a mile, and is, what Neville designates graphically, "Beastly uncomfortable riding."

Overhead the babel of an hour ago begins afresh as all the parrot tribe, startled out of a noon-day siesta, fly screeching away; a timid native bear looks down upon us with reproachful eyes from the branch of a tall gum, and then hastens to higher regions till he is lost in a bower of leaves amongst the topmost branches; and a great jew lizard squirms spirally up a tall gum near me, with half-closed eyes and well-poised head, and then follows his favourite, in primitive, mode of hiding by lying motionless on a branch, appearing to an unpractised eye to be merely a piece of bark on the tree.

As we emerge from the forest the ground

slopes away again, and I dash down the rise and endeavour to make up for lost time, hotly pursued by Neville and Musgrave.

Yoicks! Away we go once more at a tearing pace; now crossing a patch of sandy country where a radiant spread of crimson purple and white heath forms a picturesque carpet, amidst which tall "black-boys" rear their bottle by rush heads from out their bushes of spear-like grasses, and I catch an obscure glimpse of the crimson and white bell-like blossoms of the corea peeping shyly out of the munificent wealth of colour. Not that the flowers have it all their own way. Gay winged dragon-flies flash by like floating diamonds, their ethereal wings radiating a thousand prismatic tints in the sunbeams; myriads of brilliant butterflies are frivolling together over every patch of colour—ephemeral creatures content to endure for a day, unconscious that their beautiful wings might lead a more exquisite life; they exist but a sun, and sink into eternity; a brilliant plumaged honey-sucker is thrusting its long beak into the blossoms of a wild fuchsia, a couple of rose-cockatoos rise from beneath



## 96 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

our very feet, and a brown carpet snake glides away with sinuous motion into the heath.

Leaving the patch of heath behind us we gallop on across an undulating tract of grass country where, afar off between the gaps of a low ti-tree scrub, I see the waters of the Mia-Mia creek flashing in the golden sunlight. Straight for this water make the birds, and as I follow some fifty yards in rear, I watch anxiously the movements of the game and dogs as I debate hurriedly the possibility of getting across—for the creek, though shallow in parts owing to the drought, possesses just at this juncture steep banks on either side and is too wide to admit of a jump. But the emus are equal to it, and as I ride up to the edge I perceive the dogs swimming the narrow bit of water in rear of the birds, so much I see as I dash into the ti-tree, sending a couple of bronze-winged pigeons flopping away, and causing dire dismay amongst a mob of “scrubbers” which stampede in all directions, with extended tails and bellowing lustily.

For some time no crossing place presents

itself, but my horse struggles—floundering would better describe it—gamely on in the soft boggy track, and I am just beginning to lose all hopes of seeing the end of the run, when I come upon a welcome gap in the close scrub. It is evidently a drinking-place for cattle, and suggests all manner of possibilities in the shape of our being “bogged,” but it is all or nothing now. There is no time for hesitation so I urge my horse forward. Squish! Squash! I hear as he plunges boldly into the soft black mud, and, crossing the water a moment later, is struggling up the opposite bank, and once more we are on *terra firma*.

“Well done, old boy! Go ahead,” I say administering an encouraging stroke as we set off after the retreating dogs and game. The female bird is some distance behind her companion, and the dogs are almost up to her, but evidently thinking discretion the better part of valour, keep a judicious distance from her heels.

Musgrave has cleared the creek and is riding a few yards in advance of me, his face and figure liberally besprinkled with black mud. Turning in his saddle he

## 98 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

shouts a word of advice to Neville, who has apparently followed his lead into the creek, but cannot get his horse up the steep bank on this side.

"Try lower down—to your left," I shout with all my strength of a well-conditioned pair of lungs as we sweep on, and a few minutes later a hasty backward glance shows me that he has succeeded, and is sending the mare along at a rattling good pace in our rear.

"Come along, Pace. We are nearing the end of the run," shouts Kit as we reach another fence. It is a stiff dog-leg, and for a time the birds hesitate, and then trot backwards and forwards in search of a gap, the female bird is apparently almost done, but, as the dogs fly at her, a howl of pain testifies that she has bestowed a kick upon one of them.

For an instant they hang back, and once more the birds set off keeping close to the fence this time, but they are too used up for much, and easily enough Musgrave, who had ridden forward, heads them and drives them back into a corner of the paddock. Slowly we close up, getting

nearer and nearer to them, and calling off the dogs I edge still closer till within striking distance.

"Whizz-z"—and as I swing the long stock-whip by the lash, and bring the butt end down sharply, the heavy handle does its work satisfactorily as a mass of iron-grey feathers comes to the ground and the biggest emu falls dead. The sight seems to put new life into his companion, but she is soon brought back by Neville who despatches her in a like manner, and is not a little elated at this—his first *coup* being successful.

Dismounting we set to work to skin the birds, undoubtedly splendid specimens; after that we set off for the creek to water the horses, and this finished, having eased the girths, and given their reeking sides a hasty "rub down," we retire under the welcome shade of a box tree and enjoy an hour's rest and smoke.

"No sign of the others. I wonder what became of Winter," I say lazily, as I lie on the cool sward.

"He broke his bridle at the first fence, and Coldham came an awful cropper over the crab-hole country," replies Neville, as



## 100 EMU HUNTING AT COREENA

having finished an animated discussion regarding the hunt we relapse into silence.

"A glorious run," we all agree as we ride on our way across the plains and through the great forests where all nature seems at rest, and with the exception of a startled bandicoot, there is no sign of the life of the morning.

The heat is intense, the very insects seem overcome by the hot heavy atmosphere, for the sun is shining forth with relentless rays over the plains.

All the birds are asleep; there are none to be seen save two little green budgerygahs\* which are flirting energetically with a shocking disregard of all observers as they swing together on a tender gum sapling, and a tiny lark which springs up from a bush of delicate maidenhair fern, and breaks forth with an exquisite trill of music, then silently, swiftly floats back to earth like a falling leaf on a breathless day.

It is late when we reach Coreena; Winter and Coldham are waiting for us on the verandah, and we are glad enough to enter the cool-looking bungalow house, where

\* Love birds.

## EMU HUNTING AT COREENA 101

tiffin is ready, and in spite of heat we sit down as hungry a trio as ever met together to discuss grilled steaks and Verdeilho—a fitting conclusion to our morning's hunting at Mount Nepur.



A NIGHT AFTER DUCK





## A NIGHT AFTER DUCK

Then sinks the glowing sun behind the height,  
And the short twilight of the Austral day  
In turn gives way to the bright starry night,  
And to the past the evening fades away.

"By Jupiter! What a perfect night! It is almost as light as day. Suppose we go over to the lagoon after duck," someone suggests—a cheery person this—as we stroll out into the garden for an after dinner smoke with our guests, a few men who have come up for the race week from Melbourne.

The suggestion is received with unanimous murmurs of satisfaction.

"All right, I'll tell Jo to bring the ponies round at once; there are plenty of cartridges filled with No. 9., and No. 7., and we can be off by nine," Dick says in his usual cheerful way, delighted as he is at the idea of a night shoot after the busy though somewhat monotonous day we have had going round the outlying fences of the home station.

I watch his tall figure taking a short cut to the stables, through the old gardens, clearing flower beds at a bound, making light of a geranium hedge—a substantial obstacle this, four feet high, with its blood red blossoms gleaming a passionate scarlet in the moon rays—till he disappears lower down through the gate in the genista hedge; while we, meanwhile, settle ourselves on the verandah and fall to discussing the merits of certain cigars, handed round by one of our guests who has taken the Philippine Islands on his way back from Japan, and who has recently paid a visit to the famous tobacco factory at Manilla.

At intervals our conversation is interrupted by the insects attracted to the light, the worst offender being an elderly stag beetle—evidently a discontented old bachelor in search of a wife—whose noisy bumping is distracting Vic, my fox terrier, as, tired out after our first really hot spring day, she slumbers peacefully on an emu skin mat, for once oblivious of rat hunts even in her dreams.

A little silence falls upon us under the soothing influence of tobacco. Even the

great stag beetle is quiet, his aggressiveness nearly having brought him to an untimely end, in that he has knocked himself against the verandah post and is evidently suffering from a serious pain in his underneath, as he lies on the floor forlornly, kicking violently, to the consternation of a dissipated caterpillar who has swung himself down from the *Dolycus* creeper for a night out, and is already regretting his indiscretion brought to a terrified stop as he is within an inch of the brandishing legs of the unlucky beetle.

He draws himself up, full of irresolute dignity, scaring in his turn the beautiful praying mantis, which is holding his antennæ Heavenwards as if in supplication, on a *bouganvillia* leaf near me, on which a moon-beam has stolen down from between the creepers.

I am growing interested in the comedy, which reminds me of the well known lines :—

Some fleas have lesser fleas  
And smaller fleas to bite 'em,  
These fleas have other fleas,  
And so add infinitem."



and am wondering whether the little scene will end in tragedy, when Dick returns to tell us that the buggies will be round in ten minutes, and the others resort to the gun room for leggings and shooting kit generally, while I go to whistle up my retrievers, and Sambo, my favourite pointer.

We are soon ready, and leave the twinkling lights of the old greystone creeper-covered house behind us, where the kangaroo hounds set up ear-splitting yelps of disappointment as we drive past their kennels to the lower gate and out into the moonlit paddocks. Past some outlying huts, and the sheep wash, over a piece of rising ground, then, leaving the track by the post and rail fence we make a bee line for the creek, through the open grass country, our cheery laughter ringing out on the still night air as we cross a piece of stony ground, where, amid some blue gum saplings, a disconcerted bullock goes crashing away.

'Tis indeed a radiant Australian night! Overhead the dusky blue sky, canopied by stars "like fireflies heavenward clinging." Not all the efforts of the big white

moon can efface their brilliancy, though she is flooding the scene with her silver glory, touching the gnarled old eucalyptus trees, bathing the scene with her refining white lustre and softening the somewhat hard outline of the distant mountain.

A thousand subtle scents of the night waft towards us; the sweet wild orchids, in the dew-laden grasses, filling the air with their perfume, mingled with the odour of sweet-briar and sysitus; while the scent of the wattles wafts towards us in great whiffs of sweet odour, as we pass their isolated clumps; for it is springtime, and one realises to the full the wonderful work of the Creator, in a world of growing things at their best, and, as yet unspoilt by the scorching hot winds of summer which have to come.

Leaving the undulating country, we cross the creek at one of the watering places for cattle, steadying the ponies here as the buggies sidle down at a steep angle between the clumps of ti-tree, where a solitary snipe—*Gallinago major*—rises as is his wont heavily, flying off silently, so different from the ordinary species—*Gallinago Gallinaria*—

which rises swiftly, darting away with a shrill note.

He is gone before I can reach my gun, however, as I regret an easy shot, plainly visible as he is in the moonlight, a solitary snipe being nearly double the size of the ordinary bird.

Crossing the open plains beyond the creek, we skirt the foot of the mountain, towering majestically above us, where the timber growing half way up its rocky sides makes a black patch.

Around us in isolated spaces are growing box and blackwood trees, casting weird shadows on the grass, and the silence of the night is broken only by the souging of the night wind in a shey oak, where a magpie—called at the Zoo, 'Australian piping crow'—is courting his mate, and she is answering him from a distant tree, the exquisite warbling of the lovers floating out melodiously in the still night air.

Leaving the mountain behind us, we cross a piece of thistle country, and, taking a short cut, drive into a patch of forest, where sundry rustlings in the leaves of the red gums suggest that we are inter-

rupting the 'possums at supper, disconcerting the night animals, and waking up the birds, whose sleepy indignant chirps reach us as they resent our intrusion of their solitude.

A brush pigeon — *Phaps elegans* — flaps heavily away—its bronze wings flashing by us in a glint of moonlight, as he disturbs a family of black cockatoos in the hollow of a giant red gum.

Crashing through the brushwood and between the thick bracken, steering the ponies carefully between the timber, we pull up for a moment to reconnoitre and find the best way out.

A brush kangaroo rises from a group of tall ferns and hops silently away, disappearing like a grey wraith in the gloom. No sound breaks the stillness save the restless movements of the ponies and the murmurings of Nature, those weird sounds which assail one in a forest on a hot night, when myriads of God's creatures, undreamt of in man's philosophy—are at work in a world of their own.

The weird uncanny note of a "mopoke" rings out like a wail.

Here and there the moonlight creeps



down in silver rays like little inquisitive fairies, silvering the gold tinted ferns of the bracken, and intensifying the gloom, where in places overhead the leaves of the giant trees mingle thickly, shutting out the light, and here the awful loneliness of the Bush comes home to one.

'Tis no easy matter to guide the ponies in places where the undergrowth is dense; but we attain our object at last and emerge from the timbered country into the open, and I catch a glimpse afar off of the glint of the moonbeams in ripples of light on the waters of the swamp, where the harsh grating cries of the "native companions" — Australian crane, *grus Australasians*—reach me, telling me we are nearing our destination.

Some ten minutes later, we reach the edge of the lagoon, and, pulling up the ponies, decide upon plans for the night, Dick and Murray consenting to drive round the other side of the water, and endeavour to drive the duck across (as we have no punt).

Meanwhile, I take my buggy back as far as possible, tying the ponies up to a

log fence, then returning to our position with guns and ammunition near the edge of the water, and, making ourselves as insignificant as possible behind some high reed beds, we call the retrievers to heel, and I possess my soul in patience while my companion goes a little further away behind a fallen log, and being good at this sort of thing, imitates the cry of the wild duck.

The ruse is successful.

We have not long to wait, as a couple of teal—*annas crecca*—as a rule less shy than duck, rise from their nest in the reed beds in single file, parting as they come near on catching sight of us, and I let fly with a right and left shot, bringing them down in the reeds with a splash, to the dismay of, a motherly moorhen, who ought to have taken her family home to bed hours ago—and who dives, leaving four little fluffy balls of coarse down to take care of themselves.

It takes but a few moments for the retriever to do his work, though he has to swim for it, and he comes back a second time and lays a wounded bird

at my feet. It is an admirable 'squeaker,' and will no doubt be very useful as a decoy.

Once again we conceal ourselves as well as possible, for the water fowl, with which the place teams, are on the alert, and a timid musk rat, who has been eyeing me suspiciously before my shot rang out, disappears beneath a boulder, thinking his last hour has come.

A flock of grey plover—*Helveticus Squatarola*—rise from the mud bank near and go skirling away, whilst overhead out of range of the guns skim some curlew—*Numious Arquata*—their melancholy, echoing note sounding above the cries of the other water fowl in the night air.

Far away in the distance I can see the other buggy driving round the opposite side of the water, on whose moonlit surface some black swan are sailing oblivious of danger.

Half an hour passes, and the mosquitos become a nuisance, till at last, losing patience, I annihilate a vicious one by a resounding slap on my face, upsetting the equilibrium of a corpulent bull-frog, with

up-to-date and Mormon propensities, who is pompously serenading no less than three wives on a lichen-covered boulder in the bulrushes near by.

He disappears with a ponderous splash in undignified haste in the midst of his solemn "poomp, poomp."

The noise has startled the "squeaker"—wounded duck—which is guarded by Rover behind me on the grass, and the decoy is successful, for aided by some shots which ring out the other side of the lagoon, the ducks at last rise, and come our way, a long line of black dots playing the leader's game of "Come, follow me, lads."

On they come in single file with outstretched necks, clearly defined in the brilliant moonlight, and I devoutly hope they will rise no higher as they come sailing our way beneath the starlit Heavens.

As they fly within range, I can see the feathers in the leader's neck shimmering a bronze green, and realise the time has come, so, raising my favourite twelve-bore, which only weighs eight pounds, I decide



## 116 A NIGHT AFTER DUCK

to wait no longer but fire, and, a little below me, my companion follows my example.

At once the birds deflect from their horizontal course, and, after forming a double line, scatter in all directions. Shot after shot rings out, keeping us busy, scaring the wild fowl which rise on all sides as the birds fall in rapid succession, and the retrievers are kept at work until there are no more birds within range; the few remaining rising to a great height, so we lay down our guns, and collect the bag, which makes a goodly pile on the bank behind our ambush.

Bringing up the buggy, and stowing away the birds, we take our places and drive round to meet the others, who, amongst their bag, have secured a couple of wild geese—*Anser Ferris*.

Congratulating ourselves on the splendid condition of the duck—*Anas Boschas*—we spend a few moments comparing notes; and, as all the wild fowl in the vicinity are now too wild to come within shot, we agree to drive homewards, and on our way to stop for a few 'possums in the forest.

On reaching the latter, we tie up the ponies on the outskirts to a fallen gum tree, and, taking our guns, set off on foot.

All is still save the rustle of leaves, and everywhere the air is full of the sweet pungent odour of the eucalyptus trees. We have not gone far, maintaining a discreet silence, when I descry a small object on an overhanging branch, and realise instead of a 'possum it is a timid native bear, one of which I have long desired to possess amongst my pets on the station; and we lay our heads together as to the best means of capturing him, and try every ruse imaginable to entice him to the lower boughs.

O'Rourke, who hails from the Emerald Isle, tries in vain a wild Irish "Hurroosh!" which, proving of no avail, we send some ringing shots skywards. This has a desired effect, in that we see him scramble back to the trunk lower down.

Here he, however, remains obdurate, and I am beginning to despair of possessing him, when two of our fellows suggest the possibility of dislodging him by climbing

## 118 A NIGHT AFTER DUCK

the tree. It is a somewhat risky feat, and one we watch with interest as we see one of our comrades swing himself on to the lower bough.

So engrossed are we, that we take no heed of a mob of scrub cattle which have surrounded us, until turning suddenly, when the roaring and bellowing of the mob becomes unbearable, then and not till then I realise that one of them, a huge bullock, means mischief; and, before one can say "Jingo" he is upon us.

"Look out! Run for your lives," I gasp, dodging behind a stump as the infuriated beast passes me with lowered head and extended tail, thundering over the turf and crashing across the brushwood in full pursuit of Murray, who has only just time to fling away his gun and race for dear life.

O'Rourke is more fortunate, and, showing that discretion which is the better part of valour, I catch a glimpse of him disappearing like a streak of lightning behind the trees in the direction of the boundary fence.

Murray is not so lucky, and, having

climbed into the hollow of a gum tree, I note the huge beast doubling after him. Round stumps, behind trees he dodges, with the mad bullock in hot pursuit, and, in less time than it takes to write, and from our safe vantage, we watch with bated breath, and no little anxiety.

Most of the trees, huge giants of the forest afford no foothold for climbing, and evidently Murray realises this, for we see him double back to the tree where we remain in breathless suspense.

Nearer and nearer they come, pursuer and pursued, and we shout encouragingly to our unfortunate companion.

"By Jove! He is nearly done," I exclaim, as Murray comes towards us, and I note he is almost blown; and we realising his imminent danger, watch him with somewhat ghastly faces; while Smith adds to the excitement by nearly falling off his bough as we see the huge beast gaining ground.

"Once get him up and he is safe," I murmur amid breathless suspense, when, to my horror, Murray, who is a favourite with us all, catches his foot in the gnarled



trunk of the tree which is our salvation, and falls with a crash almost within reach of safety. There is an instant of horrified silence as the huge beast thunders to within a few feet of our fallen comrade, who it seems impossible to help, when to my great relief I hear the whizz of a bullet, as a revolver shot rings out, just fired in the nick of time by Dick, bringing the brute to a standstill in his mad career. Then, as a second shot follows, he plunges forward with scarcely a quiver of his huge carcass, and falls dead, nearly on top of Murray, who is scrambling to his feet.

A sigh of universal relief goes round as I shout "well done, you have finished him! What possessed the brute? Talk about a demon let loose!" as we scramble to the ground and congratulate our comrade on his narrow shave. We offer him our flasks, our faces somewhat white, for there is no concealing the fact that Murray's danger has played the mischief for the moment with our nerves; and the horror of the scene is still upon us as we collect our scattered property, and

stand for a moment regarding the carcase of the dead beast—a huge brindled bullock, one of our best cattle—and then prepare to leave the spot.

“What’s become of that bear?” someone asks jocularly, as Murray at length recovers his breath, while I answer a little shortly, “Oh, hang it! Bears be blowed! Let us go home: we have had enough excitement for one night,” while I bind up an arm of Murray’s, badly torn in his flight, and, then make our way out of the Bush to the place where the ponies are waiting.

After our late scene, I for one am relieved to leave the forest, and it is a somewhat silent party which starts homewards in the buggies with an eight-mile drive before us.

The ponies, wearied of their long wait, set off at their best pace over the open country, where to eastward behind the ranges I see the first few streaks of early dawn as we trot gaily on through the long grasses past a range of hills, where we have to look out for the crab holes, scattered about on the dewy uplands, where

in a crooked stringy bark a laughing jack-ass—*Ducilo Gigantea*—breaks out, startling us with an ironical Ha! Ha! Ha!! as the ponies crash over some dead wood, upsetting two Rosella parrots — ardent lovers, up betimes, who are honeymooning in the long grass—and who fly hurriedly away with an indignant screech.

All the early birds are up to welcome the sun, and, as we leave the track, taking a short cut past the foot of the mountain, an emu—*Droemæus Novae Hollandiae*—trots stolidly away, and we regretfully realise how few of these birds are left now in these parts, where formerly they were plentiful, for I can well remember the thriving trade carried on by a “cockatoo” settler near us, in their eggs and wild honey.

The dawn is breaking as we cross the home paddock, the moon sinking slowly but surely, and gray starlit skies making way for old Sol, who is presaging his appearance by glorious flushes of scarlet and gold; while a faint blue haze softens the earth, covering the mountain like a purple veil, save for its crest, which rises sharply defined against the horizon, a perfect study in lapis

lazuli near its summit where the sun god's kisses have already touched it.

The huts are silent as we drive by, for it is too early as yet for the men to be stirring, but, while Dick and the others take the ponies to the stables, I stop for a moment at the Overseer's house to give orders for the men to bring in the carcase of the dead bullock, and to take the game up to the house in the morning to be placed in our coolest safe, where the flies, (always a pest at this season of the year), cannot get at it.

Having chained up the dogs, I await the others on the verandah, where, after a cheery 'good night,' which sounds somewhat ironical at four o'clock in the morning, and which startles a greedy 'possum, who is gorging himself in my pet loquat tree, we part company on the verandah, and retire to get all the rest we can before our up country Race Meeting, which begins to-morrow, and at which some of us who are riding hold a secret but misguided delusion that his special colours will be first at the post.





SHARK FISHING IN  
AUSTRALIAN WATERS



## SHARK FISHING IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS

Purple and gold fading splendour 'neath a new moon  
brilliantly shining,  
Paling the stars with her rays on the water in ripples of  
light,  
Closing the scene with a wealth of white lustre refining,  
While filling one's soul with the peace and content of the  
night.

“Hullo, Mac! What are you up to? Going to set the crayfish pots?” I shout cheerily with a returning of energy towards the close of a hot wind day, as I stroll down from the small house perched above—such a hospitable little house, run by an equally hospitable little woman, for summer visitors—where Lin and I since our boyhood have come down from the station to get some fishing and bathing at Bridgwater when the heat of the late summer, with the thermometer at 100° in the shade on the station, becomes almost unbearable.

Mac, a fine old fisherman, a settler here these many years (and grand old Highlander from the Isle of Skye), as much at home on the sea as on land, if



not more so—looks up toward the sand dune on which I am standing from his seat on the rocks where on the edge of the dinghy, which is drawn up on the shingle out of the reach of the waves, he is industriously cutting up fish for bait, and deliberately removes a short black pipe as he makes answer to my query.

“Aye, Sir! Are ye gentlemen comin’? ’Tis a verra fine night for the feesh.”

“All right, I’ll ask for a late supper, and we’ll join you in no time,” I say, turning hurriedly, I must confess hastening my movements, involuntarily disconcerted as I am by the awful odours which assail me, arising from sundry dead fish, most of which are small female sharks which have been cut open and whose eggs and liver are exposed to view where they have been flung on the rocks for bait if wanted by the fishermen, and which after a sweltering day in the sun are almost too much for my olfactory nerves.

As I mount the sandy lane to the house, Coleridge’s apt lines on Cologne come into my head, and much to Lin’s astonishment I find myself murmuring,

"I counted two and seventy stenchs,  
All well defined—and several stinks "

as I run up the verandah steps, where he is indolently watching the retiring to roost of the family poultry yard, a primitive arrangement which answers admirably. It is but a large shey oak tree a few yards from the house on the very edge of the cliff sloping to the sea; a short ladder placed against this allows of a dignified procession each night, turkeys, cocks, hens and guinea fowl mounting to roost in the branches, with a placid contentment born of habit, there to remain safely until daylight, save when a southerly "buster" rolls in over the Southern Ocean (when sundry indignant cackles from perhaps a respectable elderly hen who resents her solitary night out) tell me that one of the feathered tribe has been blown from the branches, and is perambulating the world with a fit of nerves outside my bedroom window. Mac, with his usual discretion, has fastened a large sheet of tin round the trunk of the tree, forming an admirable protection from such vermin as rats and native cats, while at night he care-

fully removes the ladder to make his poultry secure, and—*voilà*!

A gay young cockerel, who has escorted his sweethearts to bed with his most *dégagé* air, is the last to ascend the ladder, as I join Lin to tell him Mac is ready to take us out fishing.

"All right! Let us try the dynamite. It's a calm night, just suited for it," he responds heartily, bustling away to get ready, and together we stroll down to the rocks, discussing a long talked of experiment—that of trying a charge of dynamite over the wreck of a steamer, sunk many years ago just below the cliffs, out in the Bay.

It is our favourite fishing ground, and anchored over the "Barwon" on a clear day, hundreds of fish are to be seen hovering about the wreck now deep in the sand.

Old Mac is somewhat dubious about our experiment but we give him a hand in launching the dinghy, and we are soon out on the sunlit waters and full of our project.

'Tis a restful evening; great peace seems over the work of the Creator. No sound breaks the stillness save the hush of the

wavelets, and the soft cry of a restless sea-bird which wings by, the sun-god kissing her ruffled feathers—a phantom-like thing of beauty—which is perhaps soaring away to a mermaid's home—a poetic idea of mine which is instantly nipped in the bud by Lindesay, who suggests that my sea-gull is more likely soaring away to those awful decayed fish on the rocks!

Out over the sunlit waters we go till well over the wreck, when Mac rests on his oars, resigned to his fate, and we prepare our charge, and cautiously lighting a fuse, let go, and give Mac orders to row for all he is worth!

He needs no second telling, and the light dinghy shoots out over the water—and not any too soon.

“Losh! Keep us! It's awfu’,” I hear Mac mutter, as resting on our oars at a safe distance we watch.

There is a sound of rushing water, as a huge column shoots heavenwards, and then assured that all is over, we row back, and the fish come to the surface. There are hundreds of them, and for a time we work like Trojans getting them into the boat,



till even Mac's face assumes a grin of satisfaction — and we have room for no more, so leave with a fine cargo of fish.

The boat is nearly up to the gunwale with fish, and we go back to the landing stage to leave our cargo.

It is our first and I must confess our last experiment with dynamite, realising as we do the wanton waste of fish it entails.

Setting off again with Mac, he rows us round the side of the Cape, crooning softly a song in Gaelic, with a far-away-look in his blue eyes which tells me his heart is in Skye. Keeping close inland, and going from crayfish pot to pot the beetling cliffs towering above us, casting weird shadows on the water, too grim here for even the seabirds to soar, with no sound save the bellow of some scrub cattle far above, feeding on the salt bush at the edge of the cliff.

Mac having set his crayfish pots, we go out further still, past sundry caves, till we reach a huge cavern, which the fishermen in these parts call the "Watery Cave." It is only on calm days that a boat can

enter, and we are bent on an hour's shark fishing.

It takes some minutes to get accustomed to the gloom, and then we get out our lines, and set to work in earnest.

We have not long to wait. Far down as the bait goes over, I can see the sharks collecting — ground sharks mostly — while Mac rests from his labours, and keeps the boat from drifting against the side of the cave—with an occasional dip of the oars.

It is exciting work, as the line goes out with a whizz, and we haul in the sharks—the biggest a blue-gray fellow, which sails round the boat, turning ever, and anon and showing his white underneath with a dorsal fin almost above the water around us. Time after time we try for him, but in vain, he is too wily, and as the shadows grow dark in the cave, we realise we must desist, and give him up.

A weird gloom has descended upon us as a bat flits by, and we get in our lines and Mac rows for the opening of the cave, and I feel somewhat relieved to be once more out in the open, as we get in the lines, and start for home.

The glorious Australian evening is nearly over. A crescent moon is rising over the distant Cape (Nelson), paling the stars, the radiance falling on the water in ripples of light, while far away over the Sugarloaf hill the night is creeping up, the light of the sun fading out in radiant flushes of purple and gold.

Keeping still well in at the foot of the majestic cliffs, Mac rows us, till Lin espies on a ledge of rock a solitary penguin, and as it is a matter of danger and difficulty he, of course, is anxious to obtain him.

With infinite caution and sundry well-meant admonitions old Mac rows the dinghy up to the ledge of rock, and my comrade climbs up among the slippery kelp, and I watch him rescuing his bird—no easy matter. His appearance sends a motherly old crab scuttling off with her family beneath a rock in a pool near me, causing a glorious purple anemone to shudder and close—as I steady the boat by the aid of some kelp—for there is a small swell rolling in from the Atlantic, and our dinghy is but a cockleshell. The small wind born of the night wafts towards us with an indefinable odour of musk

and wattle, creeping down from the cliffs and mingling with the salt air.

It is a night conducive to dreaming, and I wake from a reverie to find we are at the landing stage—a stretch of water kept open by the fishermen between the rocks, to take their boats in—and then, and not till then, do I realise we are of the fish fishy, and we are glad enough to indulge in a swim and a change of clothes, before enjoying the fresh fish, and crayfish, brought in each morning by old Mac for our supper, which is ready for us these hot nights on the verandah overlooking the moonlit sea, with Cape Nelson keeping guard over us, and gleaming white on her sandy sides across a radiant stretch of water, the other side of the Bay.





A CINGALESE TRAGEDY



## A CINGALESE TRAGEDY

In the jungle the fire flies glitter,  
As stars in an emerald light,  
All still save a bat, and its flutter  
Like a wraith whirling by in its flight,  
Tho mysterious murmurs creep through the hours,  
Mingling soft with the coo of a dove,  
In the Tropical night, 'mid the scent of the flow'rs,  
While the wind whispers everywhere " Love."

" Good-night, Miss Alymer. Don't forget that we are all to go ashore together to-morrow," I say, with a great deal more earnestness than the occasion demands, as I stand on the top of the companion, and watch a golden brown head disappearing down the stairs.

Half way the *svelte* girlish figure turns and the brown eyes lifted to mine, glance shyly towards me as a faint colour steals into the sweet face, born from the remembrance of some earnest words uttered by me, and a little comedy enacted a few moments ago under those " silent watchers "—the stars—on the deck of the P. & O. steamer.

" Forget, ah ! no. But you—if you forget your promise to introduce me to Mount



Lavinia, I shall never forgive you," she says lightly, with a shy, swift smile.

"Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing? You malign me by suggesting such a breach of the covenant!" I answer laughingly, with reproach, as Miss Alymer once more whispers "Good-night," and notwithstanding the fact that I have arrived at the lowest step, heartlessly evinces a desire to leave me.

Perhaps my very earnestness frightens her a little.

"I really must go, Auntie only gave me ten minutes. So stupid isn't it, having to go to bed at ten?" and the distractingly kissable mouth takes upon itself a most bewitching pout.

"Stupid! Perfectly idiotic!" I rejoin energetically, with a shocking disregard of the truth, but it is a requirement of Miss Alymer's aunt and guardian, which in my present state of mind, amounts almost to a hardship, and as I speak, Miss Alymer with a whispered—"No" to my humbly spoken words. "You are not angry with me for what I asked you to-night?" disappears into the large saloon, and I watch her traversing

the long passage beyond to her cabin, which is situated amidships, and then return to the deck where I fall into a reverie as I lean over the taffrail and look down on the animated scene below, where the moonbeams are lying asleep on the unruffled waters—ever and anon lighting upon dusky natives in their catamarans, they having swarmed round the vessel the instant we dropped anchor, half an hour ago, and who are now only waiting for daylight to come on board, and sell their varied collection of goods, consisting of everything from a twenty guinea sapphire to a sixpenny pine.

'Tis a night conducive to dreaming. Above in the "infinite meadows of Heaven," myriads of stars shine forth with a brilliance peculiar to the planets of the tropics—not all the efforts of a big round moon can render their shining less brilliant—while at intervals great waves of sweet odours are blown to me by the small night wind, which go a long way to annihilate the faint sickly smell of cocoanut oil in the air. It is a veritable baby zephyr creeping softly over the water, as if unwilling to disturb the sleeping moonbeams, and stealing on its

way a delicious fragrance from a boat moored just below me, filled with sweet-scented wax-like flowers, and tempting tropical fruits.

In the soft glint of the moonlight I catch a glimpse of the dusky golden cargo, as oranges lie side by side, with pines, and pomeloes, while bananas, mangoes, and other fruits are heaped in picturesque confusion.

"Look here, Neville, what about going to Kandy? Have you decided the knotty question? The purser tells me there is to be a special dispensation in the shape of six o'clock breakfast for those leaving by the early train," Dorian Devereux exclaims energetically, as he strides up the long deck to where I am standing indulging in a surreptitious cigarette aft.

Dorian (more generally known by his familiars as "Dolly") always is disgustingly energetic, no matter how limp and scorched up the rest of us may happen to be. He has an unkind knack of entreating me to join him in a quoit tournament, a cricket match, or some equally frivolous amusement, which I tell him shows a great want of

feeling, just when I have settled myself comfortably for the morning in my luxurious deck chair with a secret but firmly rooted conviction that the only way to save my collar from speedy annihilation, and keep presentable till the tiffin gong sounds, is to preserve a calm demeanour and to sit still.

But if Dorian is too energetic on occasions, it is the worst one can say of him, for he is one of those individuals, whom we—his fellow-men—speak of as “one of the right sort,” and women designate “charming.”

The only marvel is that he had not been spoilt, considering the fact that he is master of £5,000 a year, and possessor of a beautiful old place in Hants, yclept Devereux Abbey, which joins my father's, Sir George Digby's estate in the same county. Ever since we were emancipated from the school-room, and entered Oxford together, we have been fast friends, and at College it has been the old story of Damon and Pythias.

We have never known what it is to have a serious difference.

As he reaches my side now, something tells me he has set his mind on our taking this



trip into the interior of Ceylon, and how to get out of going without disclosing the fact that my actions are governed by a red, kissable mouth, and by a pair of wonderful stars unknown to the skies, in a word that I, Neville Digby, *ætat* twenty-nine, am completely under the control of the beautiful Australian girl, whom I have but known for the short period of fifteen days, is a poser.

"Eh? You were saying—Eh? ah! Yes, Kandy. Well, no, I don't think I shall go," I reply with hypocritical deliberation, somewhat absently descending from my transcendental reverie, and returning to things mundane as I realise that my companion is waiting for an answer. Then—as a happy inspiration comes to me, I continue with what I consider to be admirable diplomacy.

"You see, Dolly, we did not half do Colombo on our way to the Celestials, and this is an opportunity that may not occur again. In fact, I think it is our duty to see the place thoroughly."

This with an air of importance that ought to have the desired effect.

In spite of this however, it doesn't.

"Oh, duty be hanged!" Dorian returns flippantly, "it seems to me we saw quite enough of the place. I know I shall remember the odours to my dying day, having been born with an antipathy to cocoanut oil. Bah! I declare I can smell the vile stuff now," and Dorian turns up his aristocratic nose in fine disgust as he regards an unoffending boat close by, in which three or four well-oiled natives recline, amongst the heterogeneous cargo, for a huge wonder—never uttering a sound.

"But, my dear fellow, you may depend upon it, they are quite as highly anointed at Kandy! Away from the sea, don't you know, they must be worse, for the beggars' partiality for bathing is quite proverbial," I reply, carefully concealing the fact, which will come stealing before me, that Kandy is situated on the shores of a fine lake.

"By Jove, I defy them to smell worse than at Colombo. Scott tells me that the scenery *en route* to Kandy is awfully jolly. The railway winds along the hillside, through plantations, with the valley below, and the mountains above planted with artificial tiers of rice he says 'The

Queen's' a very good hotel, in fact—"

"But, er—six o'clock is such an impossible hour for breakfast," I remark hastily, interrupting Dorian's flow of oratory, as I realise that he is getting the best of the argument.

But he is not to be put off so easily, and merely appears a trifle amused at my last feeble objection.

Small wonder, considering the fact that ever since we commenced our globe-trotting, on leaving college two years ago, we have frequently breakfasted at a much earlier hour than six.

"Impossible! Not a bit of it. Quite a popular fallacy. One always gets up with such a rattling good appetite at any hour before eight," he says briskly, but lamely.

"I don't! The early bird business is a mistake! A gigantic fraud! The theory ought to have exploded long ago. What a poor fool that worm must have been!" scornfully "getting up with the lark always has a disagreeable effect on me, and if I breakfast at the awful hour you propose, I feel convinced I shall have one of those frightful attacks of indigestion," I reply

gloomily, hoping that Devereux will accept this view of the situation in a Christian-like and sympathetic spirit.

The awful attacks exist only in my own imagination. They are purely mythical, the complaint mentioned being a sealed mystery to me, for I possess a constitution as a rhinoceros, and a digestion equal only to that of the proverbial ostrich, or even more so.

Unfortunately Dorian is aware of this, which is my undoing.

"Oh! indigestion, that all? Very like a whale! That is so probable," he says with an ironical chuckle, as he returns to the attack, and I realise that to disguise the reason for my wishing to spend our time in port at Colombo instead of visiting Kandy, will only be to prolong the discussion, so I pull myself together, and brace myself up for unlimited 'chaff' as I say decidedly,

"No, it's no use, Dolly. I can't stand six o'clock breakfast. The very idea makes me feel like Araminta Skeggs,\* and if not indigestion, after hurrying up at that hour,

\* See Vicar of Wakefield, "all in a mucker o' sweat."



there'd be nothing left of me but a spot of grease, and a bone, besides,"—as if the idea had just occurred to me—"the Alymers are not going to Kandy." The murder is out at last!

"Whew—" and Devereux regards me curiously, as he repeats,

"The Alymers not going to Kandy? But what in the world has that to do with us?"

"Everything," I answer lightly, assuming an easy air as I flick away an imaginary ash, "I promised to introduce Daph—er, I mean Miss Alymer, to Mount Lavinia, and there may not be time before the steamer goes on Thursday if we go to Kandy tomorrow."

For a few moments Devereux is silent, as he regards me with a curious and prolonged gaze, which is infinitely more trying than the quizzing I expected, which is conspicuous by its absence. There is no sound but the lap, lapping of the water, and the animated chatter of two native boys who are discussing a ripe mango—not over the orthodox bath—but over the side of a canoe a few yards distant.

The silence is uncomfortable, and disconcerting, I hasten to put an end to it, by making a frivolous remark. Then Dorian speaks.

"So that is the way of it!" he says slowly, in a tone that amounts almost to solemnity; so serious is he that any apprehension I may have entertained about being chaffed, having given myself away, vanishes instantly, and I perceive a curious expression steal over his face.

I experience sundry qualms of conscience, which induce me to say hurriedly, "Look here, Dolly, if you want to go up to Kandy, don't let the fact of my staying here make any difference. You'll have lots of companions; the Mertons, and heaps of jolly people are going."

Another short silence falls upon us, and then Devereux says quietly :

"No, no, old fellow, say no more about it. I don't care to go without you, and after all I daresay we shall have just as good fun in Colombo."

For some minutes I reason with him, but my arguments are in vain. He is obdurate, and nothing moves him, so as a clock

below strikes twelve, we agree to turn in, and accordingly stroll for'ard to our deck cabins, for the luxury of this accommodation is ours.

It is my first experience of this, and is in reality the 2nd Officer's cabin, and in close and awful proximity to some caged cockatoos, which make night or early morning hideous, with their shriekings.

They seem to be having a more festive time than usual to-night, and seem to be heartlessly crowing over those companions gone before, with an energy worthy of a better cause, as we come into view, and Dorian leaves me with a hasty and quiet "Good-night."

There is an entire absence of that gay frivolity which usually characterizes him.

Is it imagination on my part, I wonder, but I fancy his face looks ghastly in the moonlight.

What could it be, I wonder? Perhaps I muse, the moonlight; people often do look pale in the moon-rays, with which soothing reflection I get into my berth, and tired out with this hot, tropical air, am soon beyond even the disturbing influence of the

trio of dissipated birds.

I wake with a start, and emerge from a hateful dream, in which a hideous native is bending over me, and pouring unlimited cocoanut oil down my throat, while one of those shrieking cockatoos, cackles triumphantly as he lays an egg in a most favoured cummerbund,\* an affair in crimson and white silk, purchased a short time ago in the Burra Bazaar, on our way to Burmah,—and one especially esteemed by me, because only yesterday Miss Alymer pronounced it “quite charming.”

“Fiends! Rascals! Vagabonds! I gasp, breaking out into strong language. Then I sit up, and realise that Devereux’s faithful valet Baird is bending over me, and treating me to a respectful, but unmistakable shake, for which he looks a little ashamed of himself as he says,

“Beg pardon, Sir, it is nearly nine o’clock and I have called you twice.”

“No! is it? Ugh! I’ve had a beastly dream,” I say sleepily, indulging in an exquisite, if somewhat circumscribed stretch, after which I spring up and get ready for

\* Cummerbund—Silk sash, when no waistcoat is worn, above trousers and shirt.



tub parade, and hurry off to the bathroom below, heedless of the fact that Baird is enquiring solicitously whether I prefer stripes, or Zetland spots to-day; flannels or linen.

"Both! No, I mean linen, and striped tie. It does not signify," I say hastily, as hugging a sponge, vast and unlimited in area, I hasten out, picking my way amongst the second-class innocents about the deck. Half an hour later I hurry in to breakfast, and as I stride up the long saloon I see that Devereux has but just taken his seat at our side table, where three vacant chairs testify that our usual companions, Mr. and Mrs. Alymer and their niece, have been before us.

Dorian is in high spirits, though not in possession of his usual appetite, a fact he ascribes to his not having slept well, "owing to the chattering of those confounded natives," whilst I, being anxious to look upon a fair, oval face that has been my undoing, and feeling somewhat annoyed at having overslept myself, hastily struggle through some omelette, and go up on deck with Devereux, where the natives appear to

be doing a thriving trade.

The passengers are standing about in groups, burdened with sandal-wood boxes, tortoiseshell paper-knives, chuddahs, and other articles of native manufacture.

Abaft the engine-room we catch sight of Miss Alymer investing recklessly, much to the satisfaction of a couple of oily natives, who are in unpleasantly close proximity. She is wholly absorbed, and as we go forward to greet her she says smilingly, extending her hand,

"Are they not sweet? And so cheap! Just fancy, I only gave one rupee each! I got all these for three rupees," holding out a slender hand on which rests a family of baby jumbos in ivory and ebony.

"Not really! They are quaint. Rather young to go out into the world though, aren't they? You'll be had up by the S.P. C.A., Dorian says, smiling, as he bends over the outstretched hand, and considerably sets on its legs one of the tiny elephants, which is upside down, while I carefully suppress the fact that the identical family of elephants was offered to me the other side of the deck not ten minutes ago,

at only sixpence ahead!

It seems such a pity to disillusionize her so soon—and this her first visit to Ceylon.

“Quaint,” she says now, with a delicious appreciation, as she holds up a small specimen by the ring on its back.

“Why—they are just too lovely for anything, but,”—here the white forehead is drawn up into an unmistakable frown, beneath the shady hat—“Oh! Mr. Devereux I am so cross this morning!”

“No! You don’t say so! You—er—frighten me; are you often taken like that?” Dorian says teasingly, with a pretended air of great concern, then solicitously, “May I venture to enquire what has caused the er—terrible display of wrath I see before me?”

The red pouting lips quiver suspiciously and an annoyed look creeps into the owner’s eyes, as she lowers her voice, with a glance across the decks, and answers.

“It is those horrible Tomsons!” with her eyes still on an extensive family, who are grouped together with the evident intention of going ashore.

“What! have they been making them-

selves unpleasant again?" I inquire wrathfully, compelling the brown eyes to meet mine for an instant. It is the first time they have done so this morning, and after a shy, swift glance, which in spite of me, makes my heart beat a little faster—the white lids with the long sweeping lashes are lowered as she says.

"No, not quite that, but it really is very disappointing. I'm not joking the least little bit in the world, Mr. Devereux," this last severely to Dorian, who has been discovered in *flagrante delicto* appearing visibly amused.

"No? oh no! Of course not. Neither am I," he returns hurriedly, with immediate and becoming gravity, while I hasten to inquire what has vexed Miss Alymer.

"Aunt Mary can't go ashore for an hour, and Uncle Ralph says that nothing will induce him to sleep on shore unless he can get the best rooms at the Oriental—and I have just discovered that they are all going there," with a nod towards the aforementioned extensive family, the other side of the deck, "my cabin, you know, has a coal shoot in it, and I did so want



to stay the night in Colombo," this with an air of dejection that is too much for my equanimity.

"So you shall," I rejoin rashly, "look here, Devereux and I are just going ashore. We'll get there first—out do the Tomsons you know, and if Mr. Alymer will allow us to engage rooms for him, it will be all right."

"Will you really? How good of you," and the beautiful face brightens, as the brown eyes regard me gratefully, as she looks away across the deck, a little dubiously towards a portly figure with unlimited corporation.

"Of course we will. I'll go and suggest it at once. If the intermeddling meets with the assault and battery it deserves, the consequences be on your head, Miss Alymer," Dorian says lightly, completely vanquished by the expressive eyes, "and to sleep on board with a coal shoot in your cabin! I'll go at once," and suiting the action to the word he goes.

"It'll be all right. Dorian is a born diplomatist. He'll return with all bones intact," I say cheerfully, as we watch him

anxiously, as he strides up the long deck with an air of determination, that will surely carry all before it.

After a little desultory conversation we stroll aft, and forget that there is anyone in the world beside we two as we lean over the side and await Dorian's return.

Five, ten minutes go by, and he comes.

"It's all right! Mr. Alymer says if we can secure good ones, we are to engage rooms for him, so come along, there is no time to lose," he says triumphantly as he hastens away to give some instructions to Baird.

A few moments later we slip into a catamaran, and are soon at the landing, where the usual crowd of natives assail us on all sides.

The babel is confusing. Pandemonium is a joke to it! and we are thankful to escape from the noisy throng, and reach the hotel, which is quite close. "The 'Objectionables' are just behind us," Dorian remarks as he waves away a small native boy, who has persistently followed us to sell a bouquet.

"What a bother they are! Beastly

people," I say, testily, as I realise that apart from certain discourteous proceedings on board, they have deprived me of at least an hour of Miss Alymer's society.

"They are all that. They are shocking bad form, as for the son, he is a fine specimen of the genus cad, no wonder the passengers call him 'the Cub,'" Dorian says with fine disgust.

Our voyage from the Antipodes has so far been a thoroughly enjoyable one; the only drawback being the presence of an objectionable family named Tomson—who are vulgarity personified,—and of all the disagreeable plebeians we have met in our travels, these have been the worst—as for the eldest son and heir, an ignorant "self-assertive young puppy" best describes that youth—a born booby is a joke to him, and the sobriquet of "the cub," bestowed upon him by Dolly, suits him admirably. By one and all on board, he is given as wide a berth as compatible under the circumstances, and known as "the cub," save, of course, by his own family—a large, one, for the Tomson progeny is numerous.

Talk about people smelling of money! I have heard of such, read of such, talked of such, but never even in my wildest imaginings and wanderings have I come across anything like these Tomsons. Mr. T., a retired nondescript, is the sort of person who sets one's teeth on edge by shamefully abusing the letter H. He hurls it all over the place in a barbarous and unwarrantable manner, and wantonly throws it away when he ought to be using it! His wife has an aggravated form of the complaint—no doubt it is catching—she is of the hippopotamus kind—she never walks, she lumbers! The rest of the T. family are a set of Philistines, who ought to be relegated to a desert island until they have learnt manners.

But we are nearing the Hotel, where, if the gods are looking after us, we shall secure rooms for ourselves and the Alymers.

As we run up the steps, a startled exclamation from Dorian reaches me.

"By Jove! We're done. 'The Cub's' been before us," he says wrathfully.

"Hang it! So he is. I hate ubiquitous people," I grumble, as I look up at the



figure of Mr. Montmorency Tomson leaning over the rail of the verandah, a huge cigar in one hand, a B. and S. in the other; the latter is a little way he has. All hopes of securing the best rooms for the Alymers seem nowhere—for there are already a number of people ashore from another P. and O. steamer in harbour, and the Tomson family, with their numerous staff of servants, is a consideration.

Amongst the crowd of strange faces on the verandah, we recognise many of our fellow-passengers, amongst them a Mr. and Mrs. Hulton, a charming couple who, after spending six months in Melbourne, are now *en route* to visit England before returning to New York.

She is an irresistible little woman, and liked immensely by me, if only for the reason that she is a great friend of Miss Alymer's and a sworn ally of Dorian's.

Jack Hulton is a very good fellow, and absurdly proud of his only child, a fair-headed syren of three, who reigns a queen by the right of her charms.

"Only just arrived! What a shocking want of enterprise! We came ashore at

twelve last night. I guess you won't get rooms," Mrs. Hulton says as we appear on the verandah.

"Mrs. Hulton, unless you wish to make enemies of us for life, don't suggest anything so appalling," Dorian answers, as we hasten into the Hotel.

Having toiled upstairs, and inspected out-of-the-way corners, shown us by the native attendant, whose spotless "comboy"\* forms a curious contrast to his dark skin and jet black hair, ornamented with a tortoiseshell comb—a wonderful arrangement the latter, which might well astonish even Truefitt himself—we come to a full stop, and regard each other dismally.

"Not the slightest use getting these. Alymer said if we could not engage the best rooms he should certainly sleep on board, and you see all the best are taken," Dorian observes gloomily.

"Since when has he developed such a *penchant* for a life on the ocean wave? Certainly since we rounded the Lewin!" I say sarcastically, remembering how

\* Comboy—a sort of white petticoat worn by the natives with usually a dark jacket.

recently the said ocean had been taking an advantage of Mr. Alymer's digestion and that rounding Cape Lewin, a worm best described that gentleman.

"More likely a *penchant* for saving his Hotel bill," Dorian remarks shortly. "Looks uncommonly like it! Awfully hard on his wife and Miss Alymer to keep them on board, while the ship is coaling. It's downright selfish—er—positively disgusting," I say wrathfully, as we go back to the verandah, and confide our dilemma to the Hultons. Unselfish little woman as she is, she is almost as concerned as we are, and forthwith sets her wits to work to see how she can help us.

After some deliberation, during which she promptly crushes several impossible suggestions wildly put forward by us men, and whereat a melancholy, though discreet silence falls upon us, she proposes a plan, which fills me with an insane desire to embrace her on the spot.

"I'll tell you what I will do!" she says thoughtfully, and our spirits which have sunk to zero, go up with a rush, "I will invite Daphne to be our guest. Little Merrie

can have Jack's dressing-room and we'll send the maid on board for the night," this with a brisk air which means much, and an appealing glance towards her husband, who nods a willing assent.

"Upon my word Mrs. Hulton, it is awfully kind of you," I begin, but with a mischievous glance—for she knows how it is with me—she cuts me short.

"Kind, not a bit of it! Only human. It is a shame to think of that nice girl on board in the smuts, and this heat, while we are all enjoying ourselves on shore. But her aunt is a wee bit difficult at times, so mind I rely upon you to help me."

"Trust us! Fever, smallpox, plague, and goodness knows what, falls upon rash individuals who stay on board during coal-ing," Dorian says, with a twinkle in his eyes, as we hasten away to secure our own rooms.

Half an hour later, when the Alymers arrive, Devereux and I, assuming an innocently regretful air, inform the old gentleman of our non-success in engaging rooms for him.

The news, however, does not distress him



in the very least. He appears indeed rather to like it, and Dolly is guilty of a distinct succession of winks—"nervous affection of the left eye" he calls it, and assumes a sort of "I told you so" demeanour, as Mr. Alymer observes with a resigned air, that does not impose on us in the least.

"Not a large room to be got! Ah! just what I expected. Well, we must stay on board, that's all," and I perceive a disappointed shadow flit across Miss Alymer's face.

A little later when we are discussing plans for the day, as we stand watching some native snake charmers in the roadway below the Hotel, Mrs. Hulton puts forward her little proposal, and we figuratively hold our breath as we await Mrs. Alymer's reply.

"I will take great care of her; we are only going to drive out, and dine at Mount Lavinia," Mrs. Hulton says, with her most fascinating smile, and after a little demur, Mrs. Alymer gives her consent.

The matter is arranged entirely to our satisfaction, as ten minutes later we set off in two carriages—I after much anxious

manœuvring having secured a seat beside Miss Alymer—and we are soon rattling through the streets with their interesting crowd of Cingalese, Tamils, Malays, and Moormen, with here and there a Buddhist priest in yellow robes and bared shoulder.

Various amusing remarks reach us from Mrs. Hulton, who occupies the front seat of the vehicle.

“I guess they don’t lay out much money on clothes in these parts. Evidently they believe in beauty unadorned,” I hear her say as a fine-looking native passes, whose sole attire consists of a scanty waist cloth, a hugh paper Japanese parasol and a wad of cotton in each ear!

For a full minute Miss Alymer maintains a suspicious silence, and appears lost in contemplation of some cocoanut palms; but, happening to catch my eye, she resigns herself to the absurdity of the situation, and we go off into fits of laughter, which are with difficulty subdued by the time we reach our destination, the Museum, cinnamon gardens, and other places. For miles we drive under a perfect bower of feathery bamboos and talipot and areca

palms, with broad leaved bread-fruit trees, passing stretches of paddy fields, where the natives are up to the waists in the water—and then as the evening closes in, we drive out to dine at Mount Lavinia.

What an evening we have!

Shall I ever forget that drive? The gay witticisms of Devereux and Mrs. Hulton's happy retorts, the whole dinner is a merry war of words, and for a time at least the two forget the existence of cocoanut oil with an odour which each hold in equal detestation. Towards ten o'clock we set off for our Hotel. The drive is a glorious one, through the balmy night air, beneath the tremulous stars—those privileged watchers which look down upon the sobs and sorrows of this weary old world, keeping their sentinel, in that far off infinity of space, above the fast-flying clouds—"the beat of whose unseen feet, only the angels can hear"—and all around us the silence of the night, broken only by the fitful beat of the surf, below Mount Lavinia, and the whispering of a baby night wind in the cocoa-palms. The moon shines down on the native huts embosomed in palm leaves

and an occasional glint falls on the passionate blossoms of an hibiscus, amidst the tropical foliage, where myriads of sparkling fireflies are dancing about the wealth of creepers, which fling themselves lovingly about the giant forest trees, and here and there a tall palm towers on high, its feathery leaves clearly visible against the starlit heavens.

It is a perfect night. Having arrived at our destination, Mrs. Hulton goes away to put her little daughter to bed, and her husband takes Dorian away, leaving Miss Alymer to me alone.

Under cover of the darkness on the verandah, I possess myself of a small hand and a few moments later, the shy half promise given to me on deck under the stars last night, has been made whole and—I am happy.

“Are you sure you won’t regret it, Daphne? I am only a younger son, and oh! if ever you were to wish it otherwise,” I murmur, as my voice trembles with the intensity of feeling which sweeps over me like a mighty wave.

An expressive glance is all my answer,



for Mrs. Hulton appears to take Daphne to her room.

For half an hour I sit ruminating, and then Hulton returns but Devereux he tells me has retired, and after a little conversation we too ascend to the higher regions, and a native servant conducts me to my room. The latter though small is comfortable enough. It is furnished mainly with an idea to coolness, and is separated from the next room by a peculiar bamboo partition, which curiously enough ceases two feet or so from the ceiling. Judging by the prolonged snores, Dorian is already asleep in the next room, and I marvel a good deal at his early departure—for him—to bed, as I proceed to undress, an operation which I have not proceeded with far before I discover that Dorian is in possession of the key of my travelling bag, which contains my journal and night things.

“What a bore! I shall have to wake him,” I murmur, then raising my voice, “Devereux! Hi! Dolly! Do answer!” but there is no reply.

I beat a tattoo on the partition, and getting no reply, sally forth into the corridor

and essay to open his door, but it is locked, so I return to my room, and give up all hopes of obtaining my things, when by some unlucky chance my eyes light on the partition, and the idea of climbing over it presents itself to my mind. Speedily I clear the dressing table, prop it on the bed with a chair on top, and then with infinite caution—for the table is a little gone in one leg and wobbles alarmingly—mount the structure.

A moment later I have reached the top of the partition which I hang on to like grim death, congratulating myself on my success, and recklessly disregarding sundry ominous creakings as I imagine it will now be an easy matter to swing myself over, but alas! for my delusions never were *l'homme propose*, etc., more fully verified.

Evidently my guardian angel has deserted me to-night. There comes a succession of mighty creackings, and then a final crash convinces me that the partition has given way! To be precipitated into the adjoining room is more than I bargained for, so hastily letting go my hold, I slide back into my own apartment, kicking over

the table, and chair which fall with a crash. Then, as I scramble to my feet, and hug a shin considerably the worse for wear, a terrified yell rings out in the adjoining room, in a voice awfully unlike Dorian's.

"Devereux, it's me! I say, Dolly, don't be frightened!" I exclaim loudly, then as the yells continue, I seize a candle and rush out into the corridor. Simultaneously a door opens on the opposite side of the room, and to my utter amazement Dorian appears half dressed with an astonishing alacrity only to be accounted for by the supposition that he has not been to bed.

"You!" I say, regarding him with astonished eyes.

"Yes, why not? What an unearthly noise! What the Dickens is it?" he says a little shortly.

"Why! I thought you slept there!" with a motion towards the door, where at intervals the yells continue. "I tried to climb the partition, the confounded thing gave way, and I believe I've killed somebody; that's all, "I say miserably, carefully caressing my nose to see if the bone is intact,

and as various doors open down the corridor, a wild desire to sneak straight away out of the hotel takes possession of me. My confusion increases as, instead of helping me out of the awkward situation, Dorian heartlessly exhibits an inclination to laugh.

"Then you've killed the "Cub"—Tomson. He slept there, I saw him go in as I came upstairs," he says slowly, with an unmistakable chuckle.

"For Heaven's sake, help me Dolly. Persuade him to stop that row," I exclaim frantically, as several people looking scared, appear on the scene, amongst them the Hultons, she in an eminently becoming *robe de chambre* and her *cara sponsa* in a quilt! and after them three veteran spinsters, known on board as "Battle," "Murder," and "Sudden Death," whose mouths suggest yawning chasms, and whose short and hasty attire afford a melancholy spectacle of bony extremities, and a wilderness of feet in bedroom slippers.

"Hi! Tomson! I say, Tomson! It's all right! Open the door," Devereux says loudly in answer to an appealing glance from me.



"What on earth has happened to him? Has he gone off his head or what? I guess if he continues howling much longer that he'll be laid up for repairs," Mrs. Hulton observes gravely, at which Dorian gives himself up to wild hilarity, and the three spinsters glare at me.

But I am past explanation, and can only feebly second someone's suggestion to break open the door, and a moment later we troop into the room—veteran spinsters and all!

Sitting up in bed is the unfortunate Tomson. He has certainly ceased to lift up his voice, but his whole appearance bespeaks abject terror.

Never before have I realised the full significance of the expression 'a mortal funk,' and a good five minutes pass before we succeed in making the wretched youth understand the cause of the disaster, he having become firmly imbued with the idea that at least an earthquake is devastating the place, though there is nothing very terrifying in the appearance of his room, for the bamboo partition, relieved of my weight, has sprung back to within a foot

of its original position.

Of course I apologize, and eat humble pie to any extent, and at length Mr. Montmorency Tomson having grasped the situation I return to Dorian's room, and once out of earshot, we give way to the laughter which by this time is consuming us. Not another five minutes could I hold out.

"Poor beggar! It must have been rather alarming! It sounded as if the house was coming down!" Dolly gasps breathlessly, as we go back to my room and regard the ruins. Chaos reigns there. The table lies forlornly with its legs in the air; one is conspicuous by its absence; and the unfortunate chair has parted with its back.

Stifling the laughter that is within us, for we are again shrieking internally, and using our best endeavours to keep the injured youth on the other side of the partition from hearing us, we make a hasty exit, and retreat to Dorian's room, a little further down the corridor, and when an hour later I return to my room, Devereux is in possession of my secret that I am engaged

to Miss Alymer.

Does my fancy mislead me I wonder, as we stand on the little balcony gazing out on the tropical gardens, as he gives my hand a hearty shake, and I see his face whiten even as it did last night on deck, when I told him my reason for not going to Kandy?

Naturally there is much fun and chaff over my adventure, when we all meet at breakfast.

The affair has got wind, and affords a fine fund of amusement for everyone.

Not a few of our fellow-passengers surreptitiously inform me that I have conferred a boon on the ship's company and paid out a certain young gentleman (?) addicted to practical senseless jokes, for instance cobbler's waxing deck chairs, and upsetting a whole five o'clock tea-party by introducing tartar emetic into the teapot.

If Mr. and Mrs. Tomson, and sundry little T.'s glare at me reproachfully over their cups, what is it to me?

Am I not sitting in close proximity to a fair girlish figure whose gentle voice only last night consented to be with me all

through the years to come?

Breakfast over, we five, Mrs. Hulton, Daphne, Dorian, little Merrie and I set off to visit a certain native village, and procure a supply of fresh fruit to take on board.

A delicious feeling of living sweeps across me, as we drive through the sunlit streets, with the sweet scented morning air blowing full in our faces. Overhead, never a spot mars the rich blue fathomless ether—that abode of the angels yclept Heaven—save one fleecy cloudlet, and here and there a carrion crow, which crows hoarsely as it flies above us.

Dolly is in the wildest spirits. All the years we have been together I have never seen him in a madder, merrier mood, though more than once I catch him regarding Daphne with a curious wistful air, which puzzles me. His arguments in the native shops where the wily Cingalese refuses to abate a penny are intensely comical, and keep us in fits of laughter.

Ah! me. How true is the saying "Your joy shall be turned into mourning." We have nearly completed our purchases, and



long ago Mrs. Hulton has cried, "Hold, enough!" but yet another splendid bunch of bananas tempts us. The bargain rests at one rupee, two annas. Once again Dolly is turning out his pockets, and dejectedly exhibiting his all—a solitary rupee. It has been his "all" at the last three shops, but he has, to save his conscience, borrowed from me at intervals, when hark! what is that? and we are startled by a confused shouting and hooting, and we are horrified to perceive a powerful native rushing towards us up the narrow street, armed with a large knife, which he brandishes in mid air, and whose blade glistens and scintillates in the sun. That the man is mad or drunk, there is not a shadow of a doubt.

With astonishing rapidity, the natives, one and all, exercise that discretion which is the better part of valour, and disappear: the very curs seem to slink out of sight, and we promptly follow the example set and hastily retire into the native shop. A breathless silence follows; I place my arm round Miss Alymer, and whisper reassuring words; even as I do so, a horrified exclamation from Mrs. Hulton startles us.

"Merrie! Where is Merrie?" she says, darting to the door, but Devereux is before her.

"Keep her back!" he says authoritatively, and with that he rushes into the street.

The frenzied creature has already passed us. He is making straight for the child, who all unconscious stands—a conspicuous little white-robed figure—in the roadway before the last fruit shop we entered, a little further down the street.

It is a moment of intense anxiety; of horrible suspense.

Will Devereux be in time I wonder? The powerful native is within a few feet of the baby figure. Already the cruel knife is uplifted with a passionate gesture—and a shriek of anguish breaks from the woman I am keeping back. Another moment the horrible steel will have done its work. The blue eyes may never again unclose, for the little life will be ended.

But no—yes—thank Heaven! Devereux has reached him, and as he flings himself on to the maniac, I rush out to the rescue, and a horrible struggle takes place. It is a revolting sight; a fearful thing to witness,

for the man is filled with the superhuman strength of madness ; it is a case of running 'amok,' and it takes eventually five men to overpower and secure him. But at last secured he is: then as I make my way out of the crowd I see Mrs. Hulton and Daphne are mingling their tears together, as they hold the child, and Dorian is leaning white and exhausted against a door-post.

"It isn't much. Only a scratch," he says breathlessly, but an ugly crimson stain on his flannels tells me the necessity of returning at once to the Hotel.

Hastily I summon the vehicle waiting for us at the end of the narrow street and we drive silently back to our Hotel, for the horror of that scene is still upon us.

Devereux keeps up wonderfully as we drive to the quay, and embark for the steamer, but once in the boat he lies with closed eyes and an ashen face, which terrifies us all, and I am thankful when, after what seems an endless time, we reach the steamer, and willing hands help me to carry him to his cabin, just half

an hour before we steam out of harbour, where small and anxious groups stand about on the decks discussing the unfortunate event of the morning, for the knife has penetrated the lung, and Dorian lies nigh unto death.

Seven days later—the week having been a terribly anxious one—we near Aden, and I trust all danger for Dorian is over, for in spite of the awful heat, and ye gods it is hot! he has to-day seemed a little brighter, a little stronger; and so I tell Daphne, as tired out with anxious watching I rest beside her in a luxurious deck chair, and the tender brown eyes grow glad as she listens.

“Ten o’clock already. I must go back. Good-night, sweetheart,” I say as a clock in the saloon below strikes ten, and warns me that it is time to go back to the invalid. He is awake, and a relieved expression flits across his face as I go to him.

“Well, old fellow, we’ll soon have you round again. You’re looking infinitely better,” I say cheerily.

A curious smile lingers for an instant



on his face.

"No, Neville. Never that. I'm glad you've come back. I have something to say," he says slowly.

What is it that comes to me as I listen? An indescribable chill at my heart that renders me silent with a great fear.

Even during the last hour a change seems to have come over him, as he lies here under the stars, outside the chart-house, where the captain has kindly allowed him to be, to get all the air he can, and I can but listen, for speech seems to have deserted me, and I silently take the paper held out to me by the trembling hands.

"What is it, Dolly?" I murmur at length with an effort.

"Only a few directions; the doctor wrote it down for me. Will you see my wishes carried out—and Neville, I want you to have the Abbey. I have said so there," with a nod towards the paper.

"No, no, dear old fellow. Get well; you shall—you must—and I cannot take this. It wouldn't be right or just," I murmur, while tears, unendurable scalding tears,

flow down my face.

Is this to be the end of all my hopes, my prayers for Dorian's recovery?

"Don't take it so hardly, Neville. I have known for some days, and will just leave the property to you—I have no near relations, and surely you won't refuse my last request? Something tells me I shall not live till morning," the dear voice I love so well speaks pleadingly, as I kneel and bow my head to hide the sorrow that is now unmanning me.

No, no, Dolly, I cannot accept it. I cannot indeed. Ask me anything else," I say brokenly.

A pained expression flickers for an instant on his pale face, and then softly, hesitatingly he says,

"If not for my sake, will you for Daphne's?"

Then I shake my head. He raises himself on one arm; twice he essays to speak before any sound comes, and then he says,

"Listen, Neville, and you shall hear something which I never intended to pass my lips, but I will tell you now."

And then with weak, hesitating accents he tells me this thing which fills me with dismay—and which my own happiness has made me so blind to. He too loves Daphne Alymer!

A great astonishment steals over me—a feeling of unutterable regret as I listen, and marvel, at the wonderful unselfishness Dorian has shown towards me.

“Oh! Devereux, old friend, to think you should have suffered through me—after all the years we have been together, and you so good to me,” I murmur brokenly.

“No, no; she did not care for me—in that way. It would have made no difference,” he answers, as once again the doctor comes forward and administers some restorative, and then goes back to where he has been leaning over the side, leaving us two alone again.

The sad eyes regard me wistfully, entreatingly, as I kneel beside him.

“What is it, Dolly?” I say gently as I lay one hand on the blue-veined forehead where the death dews are already tarnishing the brown hair.

“If I could but see her once again,” he

whispers.

"So you shall in the morning," I answer soothingly.

"No, no if ever now," he says hastily, and as I look upon the pleading eyes I hesitate no longer but hasten away, my own eyes blinded, and dim with scalding tears.

It is past midnight when I knock at Msis Alymer's cabin.

"Dying! poor, poor fellow; of course I will come," she says. "Darling, do not grieve so terribly. It hurts me to see you," this with a little catching of the breath, as in spite of me a hard, dry sob breaks from me, and with that she draws my face down to hers, and for the first time kisses me of her own accord.

I pull myself together with a great effort, as she lays her hand in mine and silently, swiftly, we hasten away, to where Dorian lies dying.

Oh! the sadness of it!

Going up to him with that infinite and beautiful tenderness which possesses some women, Daphne falls on her knees beside him, and with the intention of making him



more comfortable, places one arm beneath him, and raises his head on the pillow.

A solemn silence falls upon us, broken only by the throbbing of the screw and the cry of the sea birds, which flash by ghostlike and indistinct in the silence of their flight over the pale moonlight that is silvering the ocean.

An hour passes, still Daphne kneels on.

Twice I make signs to her to let me take her place, but she shakes her head, and so we three keep watch beside Dorian, who lies with his eyes fixed on Daphne.

Once he turns to me with the old pleading look again in his face. The mute appeal is enough. I understand, and in answer to his unspoken thought I whisper some words to Daphne. She glances towards me a little fearfully; again I say,

“For my sake, darling,” and she hesitates no longer, but bends and kisses the pale altered face.

Shall I ever forget the look of intense gratitude with which his eyes meet mine as he murmurs.

“God grant you a long and happy life together.”

Once again a weird silence falls upon us, and my darling still kneels on supporting the handsome head which will soon be with us no more.

Then as the glimmering dawn appears, I see a smile pass over his face, and at a sign from the doctor I bend and place my arm round the little kneeling figure.

"Hush! You will wake him! See, he has fallen asleep. Let me stay a little longer," she pleads, though her face has grown white and I know her arm must be cramped and aching.

Aye! He has fallen into that sleep which knows no waking. An angel has whispered to him, and with Daphne's arm supporting him and a peaceful smile upon his face, he has gone to the Shadowland; has crossed the border to that other world, where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor pain; has entered on that long bourne from which there is no returning.

Ah! me. Poor Dorian!

Peace at last of peace Eternal is his calm sweet smile  
a token?

Has some angel lingering near him let a radiant  
promise fall?

Has she told him Heaven unites again the links that  
Earth has broken?

## 186 A CINGALESE TRAGEDY

For on Earth so much is needed, but in Heaven,  
Love is all!

Perhaps something in my face betrays me, and tells her he has gone from us, for as I raise her from her kneeling position the slender figure grows heavy in my arms, and with the doctor's help I lift her and bear her away to her cabin across the silent deck in the dawning, where there is as yet no stir or sign of life and no sound, only some sea-mews, skimming and crying.

It is an evening in October. The world is all aglow with the golden splendour of autumn as I send the big grays along at a spanking pace from the station, having been away to a neighbouring county for a bachelor's shoot.

It is the first time we have been separated since our marriage, for Daphne and I are quite an old married couple now. It is two years to-day since our wedding, and in spite of critics and *fin de siècle* lady writers, we are unfashionable enough to believe that there is such a sentiment as love in existence between man and wife, and it is now with the impatience of a

lover, that I fling the reins to a groom and hasten into the house.

The drawing-room is empty; the library also deserted, and two steps at a time I hasten up the broad staircase, in search of Daphne, and thinking to surprise her, open the door of my wife's boudoir gently. There is no light in the room, but the firelight glow enhances the picture before me.

Reclining in a low chair, dressed still in her tea-gown, is Daphne—fast asleep.

The fair head and exquisite childish face are thrown up into strong relief by the dark velvet chair in which the girlish figure seems almost lost.

Silently I steal across the room, throwing a sop to Cerberus in the shape of a soothing pat to the dogs—which gallop round me and pause before the little sleeping form. Her face is pale and once a long sigh escapes her.

Of what is she thinking I wonder, as I bend and press a kiss on the mobile mouth, and as I do so I discover traces of tears on her cheeks.

She wakes with a start, and two soft



arms steal about my neck as she murmurs.

"Oh! Neville, it is so good to have you back."

There is an eloquent silence, and a moment of acute jealousy on the part of Satan, her black pug; then I stand a little away, and scan her face closely, as I say.

"Tell me, Daphne, was it only that you missed me, or has anything vexed you?" and the brown eyes grow dark with sorrow as she says quietly.

"I have been thinking of Dorian, and oh! Neville, I never knew how it was with him till to-night," as she speaks she points to an open book by her side.

It is my diary for 1895—and I take up the book, and read the paragraph blurred and indistinctly written that night after I had left Daphne in Mrs. Alymer's care, and gone back to kneel beside a man's silent form in such anguish that I pray God may never again come to me.

"Poor Dolly! Poor dear old fellow," I murmur, as I close the book, and gazing into the fire, fall into a reverie from which my wife's voice rouses me.

"Neville," her voice ever sweet and low, trembles slightly as she says, "I want to ask you something."

"What is it sweetheart?" I say, wondering a little at her hesitation, and so low is her answer that I have to bend my head to hear.

"If God sends us a little son, shall we call him 'Dorian?'"

All paleness has fled from the beautiful face, and taking the childish figure into my strong arms I kneel beside her as I read her secret in the tell-tale face, and assure her that it shall be as she wishes.

"And 'Ian' for short?" she says a little tremulously.

"And Ian for short," I answer, and as I kiss the tender roseleaf face, I pray earnestly that it may not go hardly with her, and my own eyes are wet with tears as I murmur.

"Darling, darling!"

And when the glorious June roses are blooming, and the swallows are flirting energetically beneath my library window, with an energy that scandalises two modest

wrens with remarkable sketchy bodies—put quite in the shade by their tails—God sends us a little son, and we call him “Dorian.”

What is there left to say?

Only that Heaven answered an earnest prayer which went up from an anxious heart one evening last autumn, and I hasten to lay down my pen, and receive smilingly my usual fate when the nursery is invaded by a merry girl wife, and little Ian is put into my arms, while Daphne looks on mischievously, and wickedly refuses to take back the tiny bundle which is causing me positive tortures, until I aver solemnly that if she doesn't relieve me of it speedily I shall let it fall, and break it into bits—a declaration which has the desired effect, and once again I breathe freely, as laughing softly I bend and lay my lips on Daphne's.

MY TERRIBLE NIGHT  
IN MALTA





## MY TERRIBLE NIGHT IN MALTA

I thought that the swallow was wooing already,  
her mate to the nest,  
I thought that the wild bee with kisses already,  
the first rose pressed;  
And, that thou were clasping me Love already,  
close to thy breast.

“Au revoir, old fellow! Then we shall meet about a fortnight hence,” says Kit Warner, giving my hand a hearty grip—and I hasten down the companion.

“Good-bye, Sir Joscelyn! don’t forget to come and see us in London,” adds his sister, as she stands on the deck of the P. and O. steamer which is just about to leave the harbour of Valetta *en route* for England.

“That is not at all likely,” I reply smiling, as I glance up from the boat at the beautiful face of the Australian girl gazing down at me, as she leans over the taffrail with her hands still full of the large bunch of scarlet hibiscus and blue moon flowers that we have brought from the shore, and I mentally register a

vow to lose no time in paying a visit to the "Alexandra" (where I know the Warners are to stay for the season) as soon as I arrive in town.

With a farewell flourish of my hat and a last wave of the hand, I take my seat, and, hastening out of the way of the great screw that is churning the water into foam, am quickly rowed ashore by my two Maltese boatmen. It is Sunday evening, and the sound of the distant church bells is softly melodious as it comes wafted over the water. As I land on the Piétà and toil up the numerous steps leading to the Strada Reale, I pause for a moment to watch the huge steamer vanishing away in the dim twilight, and a feeling of regret comes over me, as I think that the pleasant voyage is past, and that the jolly days ashore with the Warners at the coaling ports are at an end. No more nights on the quarter-deck, under those silent watchers the stars; no more sweet frivolous conversations, with a fair face beside me, and great eyes purple as the darkest petal of a heartsease, or perchance a glorious translucent blue, looking mischievously at me

from under the shadiest of Panama hats, in the gleaming sunlight of the tropics, or gazing thoughtfully over the moonlit waters of the Red Sea. It is just a year since I retired from the army—at that time being stationed in India—and started for a trip to China and Japan, then going on to visit the Antipodes before returning to settle down in England.

Curious cities have I visited and strange scenes have I witnessed during the past twelve months, enjoying myself in my own way, living the life of a veritable wandering Jew, globe trotter—what you will! I have walked the streets of the Celestial cities; eaten rat pie in Canton one night, with a revolting equanimity that I shudder to think of now; a few days later, dining in state with the genial governor of Hong Kong, in company with no less than four distinguished admirals; I have spent three months in Sydney, picnicked in the beautiful harbour, and visited the Blue Mountains; I have fraternised with Australian cousins in the gay capital of Victoria, witnessed the wonderful Melbourne Cup race, and gazed with astonishment at



the triumphs of Worth and his *confrères* worn by the ladies on the Flemington Lawn. I have visited the beautiful Gippsland Lakes, spent a week with the Governor at Mount Macedon, enjoyed a week's kangaroo and emu shooting on a station in the west of Victoria, *en route* to join the mail steamer at Glenelg. And now, as I stroll through the narrow streets of Malta, after all these months of travel and unrest I begin to long for the quiet of my old English home in Sussex, and almost wish that I had gone straight on in the steamer that has carried me so comfortably for five weeks.

Perhaps my dissatisfaction is caused by the thought of those bewitching blue eyes, or the remembrance of a few soft words uttered on the Baracca this morning, when leaning over the parapet, ostensibly watching the dancing waves—with Kit at a safe distance absorbed in the movements of the red-coated sentries—I had told Eveline Warner that I loved her—not that I would bind her to any engagement, deeming it unfair, before she had seen something of the world, or had, as I told her, ‘had her

fling'—but a swift glance and whispered word had made me happy and content to wait.

All day I have been doing the honours of the little island I know so well, having been stationed here with my regiment for a short time, some years ago. We have visited the dried monks of Chitta Vecchia, walked through the gardens of Florian, paid a visit to the "sick man," where I persuaded Miss Warner to taste the famous ices of Bisaccia, and initiated her brother into the mysteries of a 'Nicobite'; we have visited the church of St. John, and looked upon the beautiful picture of the Annunciation attributed to Fra Angelica, and now that my vocation of *cicerone* is at an end I cannot help feeling regret that the day is over. Thus musing I continue my way, and am suddenly reminded of the object that has induced me to break my journey and stay for a week at Malta.

"Hullo! Why, it's Ferrers, by all that's wonderful. Where did you spring from?" exclaims my old adjutant, standing on the steps of the Club.

"Arrived by P. and O. this morning,"

I say smiling, pleased to think I am not yet forgotten, for there is no mistaking the genuine look of pleasure on Varley's face.

"Well, you are a refreshing sight," he says, as together we enter the building, and I am surrounded in a very short time by a group of "our fellows," as I still call my old comrades.

"You see I heard the regiment had arrived here, so I couldn't resist stopping to see how you looked in your new quarters," I say to Cavaye, half an hour later, as I stroll back to my hotel, where he leaves me to dress preparatory to dining at mess. For one and all, they have insisted on my spending this evening with them. On reaching the hotel, I find my valuable factotum, Barton, who has accompanied me on my travels, waiting to receive me.

"Your room is rather far up, sir, but the hotel is so full, and as there is a lift I thought you would not mind," he says as I enter.

"All right, Barton, I dare say it will do," I answer, as he leads the way to the 'elevator,' I hear an American lady

who has just come in describing the lift.

It is far up—tremendously so. One, two, three floors we pass in succession; here the American lady departs, and as I continue the ascent I hear her informing her companion in the usual nasal ascent, that grates through my head like a scissors grinder, “that those elevators are so stuffy, she is sweating awful!”

“By Jove! What a woman, and what a voice?” I murmur, as we still go on, and I begin to wonder how much farther I am to be carried heavenwards.

But we come to a stop at the fifth floor, and Barton respectfully informs me that we have reached our landing.

“I should think so! Why, this is the end of all things,” I grumble, as I follow him down a long passage, and enter a room at the far end. But all my ill-humour vanishes as I look round the large, airy chamber, a positive luxury, after being cribbed, cabined, and confined in a compartment six foot square for the last thirty-five days.

“Well, it is a consolation to have plenty of elbow room, if we *are* skyed!”



I say to Barton, as I finish my dressing, and telling him not wait up for me, hurry off.

What an evening we have, and as dinner progresses I can almost fancy that I am back again in the old barracks at Cherokee as I regard the well-known trophies of regimental plate with quite a fatherly interest, and listen to the well-remembered voices.

Everything seems the same, save that there are no black figures gliding swiftly about, no waving punkahs, and I notice that one or two familiar faces are absent. Far into the night we sit talking, relating anecdotes, and discussing the events of the past twelve months, till a distant clock strikes one, and startles me out of a reverie.

"By Jove! how time flies! I must be off," I say, as I bid Varley and Cavaye good-night, and, arranging to meet on the morrow, take my departure.

It is a glorious night. Overhead, in the blue vault of heaven, those "forget-me-nots" of angels the stars keep silent watch, and the pale light of the rising moon lies

in soft ripples of silver on the sea. A baby wind born of the night, steals over the island, bringing great whiffs of sweet odours from the distant gardens lying asleep in the dew, and making the air heavy with scent of syringa and orange-blossoms. It is a night graven on my memory for years.

There is not a soul visible when I reach the hotel, save the drowsy-looking porter, who nods me a sleepy good-night as I pass. Everyone has retired, and is sleeping the sleep of the just or unjust, as the case may be. I am too late for the lift, so am compelled to mount the long flights of stairs, and feel thoroughly tired out by the time I reach my room at the far end of the corridor. I do not spend much time undressing, and am soon comfortably settled in bed, and dozing off in a blissful state of unconsciousness, when curious sounds in the next room attract my attention, and I am roused by a succession of mysterious noises. There is a door between my room and the next, and it being my custom to fasten myself in before retiring in an hotel, I have

tried this door some time ago and found it locked. Glancing in the direction of this now, I see there is a light shining through the key-hole, testifying to the fact that my next-door neighbour is not one of those sleeping the sleep of the just.

There are heavy rumbling sounds as if the furniture is being dragged about, accompanied by a mumbling and muttering in a deep guttural voice.

"Some unfortunate beggar, who has been dining, not wisely but too well!" I think sleepily, as I turn over, and console myself with the idea that it will be quiet as soon as he gets to bed. But time goes on, and the noises increase. In vain I bury my head beneath the bedclothes, and hug the pillows close to my ears, to shut out those tormenting sounds. It is no use, and, sleep being out of the question, I sit up, and gaze dismally at the bright moonlight that is creeping in through the chinks of the chutters.

"Confound the fellow! What the dickens does he mean disturbing people like this?" I exclaim, now thoroughly angry, as I listen to the sounds in the adjoining room.

Thump! thump! bang! crash! I hear.

“What an utter beast the man must be!”

I say savagely as I make a tour of the room in search of the matches, which are anywhere but where they ought to be. Slowly, with great deliberation, I paw round the table, and knocking my toe against the leg of a chair, am compelled to sit down and hug my lower extremity till the pain has somewhat diminished, when I give up the search for the matches as hopeless, and sally forth to find the night porter. But here again I am unsuccessful. He is evidently sound asleep, and though I peer over the balustrade in the centre of the corridor, drop my boots into the hall below, and make use of various other devices, my efforts to arouse him are in vain. Now, I have not the remotest intention of climbing down those interminable stairs again—remaining awake all night would be preferable even to that, so there is nothing for it but to return to my room, which I do, and relieve my feelings by banging my door violently. It evidently has a salutary effect; for the sounds cease, and all is quiet. Suddenly recollecting that



my matches are on the mantelpiece, I feel my way to that end of the room (taking care of my toes this time).

"Here they are!" I say, pouncing upon a small flat box, which I proceed to open, and discover that I am on the wrong tack, as a shower of tooth-powder descends on to my naked feet; but I am getting accustomed to my ill-luck by this time, so I philosophically continue my search, and after a little more fumbling return to bed triumphant with the matches. For some minutes I remain with my candle burning, but all being quiet I extinguish the light and lie down.

I have no sooner done so than those abominable sounds begin again, and the noise is worse than ever. The racket is frightful. Pandemonium is a joke compared to it. "No human being could stand this, and I *won't*," I say viciously. I am getting desperate, and without waiting to hear more I jump out of bed, and, hastening across the room, give a sharp rat-tat at the door between the apartments, at the same time intimating to my neighbour that I shall feel much obliged if he will make less

noise. The crashing and banging cease, but the muttering continues, and as I strain my ears and listen I distinguish a few sentences, an oft-repeated one being, "*Questo è l' Inferno, ed io sto qui.*" Then is quiet. "That's settled him," I say, smiling grimly as I return to bed, thinking what a fool I was not to try this before. But I have had a large and varied experience of drunken people during my travels, and have generally found they are best let alone; so I avoided interfering with the nuisance next door, not caring to risk a scene. However, it is all quiet now, and, tired out, I am soon fast asleep.

Crash! Bang!! Crash!!! and I am awakened by the most awful series of concussions. It is noise enough to wake the dead—a very Bedlam let loose, and I think at least the hotel must be on fire, or an earthquake devastating the place.

"Good Heavens! what is it?" I exclaim, sitting up in bed and hastily lighting the candle by my side, and as I do so the door is burst open, and a man falls headlong into the room. In an instant he has regained his feet, and comes towards me,

brandishing a something, which I discover on nearer inspection to be a wooden shutter, and as I note the tall powerful figure, and regard the eyes almost starting out of their sockets, the horrible knowledge comes to me that it is no drunken man I have to deal with, but something far worse—a madman—a creature without sense or reason. One glance round the room convinces me that I am quite at his mercy, that I have nothing to defend myself with; even my sticks and umbrella are unattainable, being securely strapped together in a distant corner. On he comes nearer the bed. Seizing a pillow, I fling it in his face; and as he staggers back I extinguish the candle, and scrambling out of bed rush into the adjoining room, deeming it useless to wait and unlock my own door. A scene of indescribable confusion meets my eye. No wonder I have been unable to sleep. The furniture, broken to pieces, lies all over the room. The very bed has been dragged out of place, and the great wooden shutters wrenched off their hinges, while the floor is covered with strips of flannel and linen, all that

is left of the bedclothes. Rushing to the door, I try in vain to open it, but I find to my dismay that it is locked, and the key has been removed. Baffled, I turn hastily, and have just time to spring on one side, when the madman, who is close behind me, brings down the leg of the table (with which he has armed himself) with a mighty crash on the wall just where I was standing. Another second and I should have had my head battered in. Before he has time to turn I rush past, but my adversary is too quick, and I have only gone a few paces when he is after me, and seizing the tail of my nightshirt drags me back.

"Now for it!" I say to myself, imagining that the time has come for a hand-to-hand conflict; so I exert all my strength to get free and face my antagonist. But fortune, or Heaven, favours me. To my astonishment I suddenly find myself freed, and a tearing noise tells me that my garment has parted. The release is so sudden that I stumble forward on the floor. As I scramble to my feet I see the maniac has rushed past, and stands blocking the



entrance to my room. Escape is impossible; quickly I glance round the room in search of a bell, or some means by which I can make known my predicament, and at length catch sight of a small button in the wall, near the bed. Keeping my face towards the man, not caring to risk another descent of timber on my head, I retreat backwards in the direction of the wall, and have nearly reached it when the maniac becomes aware of my intention. With a fearful volley of imprecations he springs towards me, and I have only just time to back against the wall and seize a chair, which I raise on high to ward off the blows which descend in rapid succession. At length, finding his blows resisted, the lunatic desists for a moment, and I sneak one hand furtively behind me, and press the tiny knob at my back, still holding the chair upraised with my right arm. For some seconds we stand gazing at each other, and I have time to note the awful object before me. His face has on it the most diabolical expression that it has ever been my lot to witness. It appears to me the very personi-

fication of his Satanic Majesty. Great masses of jet black hair hung over the low frowning forehead, above the distorted features and blood-shot eyes glaring fiercely at me, as a wild beast about to spring on its prey. Still with my hand pressing that knob, I stand mentally anathematizing the whole tribe of electric bells, and this one in particular.

“Oh for a good, sensible old-fashioned bell-rope, with which I could ring a resounding peal!” I think. Not a sound breaks the stillness save the ticking of a watch on the floor, and the heavy breathing of the man before me. My arm is becoming cramped and trembling, and I begin to wonder how much longer I shall be able to hold out, as the great beads of perspiration trickle down my face. A spark of hope flashes through my mind as I realise that all this time (it seems hours to me, but in reality is only a few seconds) that bell is ringing, and must bring succour sooner or later. But a few seconds more and all hope departs. Unable to hold the chair any longer with one hand, I bend forward and draw my hand gently from

behind me. But the movement does not escape the sharp eyes of my enemy. With a tremendous yell of rage he drops the leg of the chair that he has been using as a battering ram, and, seizing the chair I am holding, twists it out of my hands as if it were a mere toy, and flings it to the far end of the room. Again ensues another rush as I endeavour to reach my own apartment. It is my only chance; once unlock my door and I am safe, I think as I scramble across the bed, hotly pursued by my adversary. By a quick flank movement he outstrips me, and stands blocking the doorway, gesticulating violently, and once more we are face to face. This time, however, his long lean hands are empty, and I feel there is a chance for me now that we can fight fair, man to man. Not but that I am aware the odds are frightfully against me; that my strength is as nothing pitted against that great powerful figure opposite me, full of the fictitious strength of madness—a strength that enables its possessor to break up strong furniture as if it were so many pieces of bamboo. With a muttering of fierce oaths uttered

in Italian, he springs towards me, and then ensues a terrible struggle, as together we are locked in deadly embrace. For some time I succeed in holding my own, but I know the conflict cannot last much longer, for my strength is ebbing fast as the minutes pass, and I am still fighting desperately with the maniac. With a violent effort I break from him, knocking against the washstand and upsetting the jug and basin, which fall with a crash. Crossing the room, I succeed in reaching the bell, and press my finger on the knob, leaning against the wall, breathless and exhausted, vaguely wondering what will be the end of it all. Standing opposite me is that hateful figure, watching me as a cat watches a mouse. He is quiet for the space of a minute; then, with a demoniacal grin, he deliberately stoops, picks up a large piece of the broken crockery, and hurls it at me.

A sharp stinging pain darts through my brain; a sensation of agony that I pray God I may never again experience; my eyes are blinded with a rush of warm blood, and then—I see no more—I only



know that I am struggling in a sea of darkness, a very cavern of Stygian gloom, and that long bony fingers are gripping my throat. Once again that awful struggle commences, but, blinded and weak from loss of blood, I am almost powerless to defend myself, and am soon on the floor, with a gaunt bony figure kneeling on my chest.

Never until now have I realised how sweet it is to live.

"Help!" I shout, but the words die away in a faint whisper, my parched throat and dry lips refuse to utter a sound. "O God, help me!" I moan, but there is no answer save a mocking fiendish laugh. Closer and closer grip those cruel, claw-like fingers. The agony is intolerable. My whole life passes before me as a flash. Stunned, bruised, and bleeding, I lie there; how long I know not; it seems an eternity, hours, days, weeks. I can no longer struggle. All my strength is gone. The warm blood still flows from my eyes, and so I lie in a stupor of despair, and can only hope that the end will be speedy—when, hark! What is that? A glimmer

of hope struggles into my mind, and with one last feeble effort I endeavour to free myself from the hands that are choking me. I hear a murmur of voices, a hurrying to and fro of footsteps, there is a buzzing in my ears, and then all is a blank.

“Yes, he is certainly better. Thank Heaven!” and as I recognise Varley’s voice I become dimly conscious that I am lying on a bed in a dark room.

“How long have I been here?” I ask, as I raise a weak arm, and push the bandages from off my eyes.

“Hush, old fellow. Don’t talk; you have been ill, but we’ll soon have you right again,” my old comrade answers.

“Why don’t you light the candle? How dark it is!” I murmur, and as I speak a remembrance of that awful scene comes over me, and I shudder violently.

“My dear sir, you really must not talk,” a strange voice makes answer.

“Yes, but light the candle. I hate this darkness,” I say fretfully. There is a pause, and then a whispered consultation,

and again the strange voice answers me, in tones that are somewhat softer, gentler than before—

“It is Tuesday morning.”

“Tuesday!” I exclaim in astonishment “Then it is nearly a week since that terrible night,” and as I begin to think a vague uneasiness fills my brain. A horrible suspicion comes to me, and leaning on one elbow I raise myself in bed. I long to ask a question, but dare not, fearing to confirm the dreadful suspicion that is haunting me.

“Barton! Varley! What o’clock is it?” I gasp in weak, hesitating accents. There is another silence, and then my old comrade answers in low tones—

“Half-past eleven.” It is true then: my worst fears are verified. As the terrible knowledge comes to me that I am blind, I turn my face to the pillow and a great sob breaks from me. It is a horrible, an awful thing to realise that never again shall I see the light, never again shall I be able to look upon the dancing waves, the glorious blue sky, or the thousand and one beautiful things

that God has sent to brighten the vision of poor mortals on earth and take away some of its pain. It is enough to fill anyone's heart with bitterness, and for three long hours I battle with this agony. In vain the doctor and Varley entreat me to compose myself, telling me that the case is a curable one, but some instinct tells me that it will be otherwise. In vain my faithful servant Barton implores me not to grieve so dreadfully, telling me that I may undo all that good care and nursing have done for me. It is no use. I cannot help myself; that terrible word blind seems to be written on my brain in letters of fire. Once again I fall into unconsciousness, and many days pass before I am well enough to hear the account of my miraculous escape from the maniac, and to learn that my assailant was the Count Ranino, an Italian, who had been confined in a lunatic asylum some two years ago, and only released as cured three months previous to the night he attacked me so savagely, when it eventually took three men to hold him.

. . . . .



It is the close of a summer's evening, and I am back again at Joscelyn Towers, the dear old home I have been away from for so long, and of which my mother has taken such good care during my absence. Through the open window of the library, where I am sitting, great breaths of sweet perfume are wafted, telling me that the glorious June lilies and roses are blossoming everywhere in the old gardens. On all sides there are signs of the summer. A faint hum of busy insect life mingles with the chirping of many birds, and I hear the joyous trill of a lark in the far-off blue ether, and an animated twittering of a pair of swallows flirting under the eaves. Every now and then the sound of fresh young voices and merry laughter is borne on the wings of the faint breeze, and I hear the clear rich tones of Kit Warner saying, "Three all; your serve, Lady Edith."

For the Warners are staying with us. They have been at Joscelyn Towers three weeks; and, to my intense regret, they intend returning to London to-morrow. I have been feeling out of sorts all day, and

as I sit alone, having stolen away from the merry group on the lawn, an exceeding great bitterness fills my soul. A longing for what never can be comes to me, and I bow my head on my hands, and become a prey to despondency. It is not often that I give way like this, but to-day I try in vain to conquer the demon of despair that is hovering over me, making the future seem so dark, so hopeless.

“Oh, Eveline, my love, my love!” I murmur, thankful that there is no one to witness my sorrow, no one to see the great scalding tears—unendurable tears—that trickle down my face. Presently I hear voices approaching, and I recognise the low, sweet tones of Eveline Warner, as she talks to my mother. The two have become fast friends during the past three weeks.

Hastily I sit upright, and endeavour to compose my features; ashamed of my weakness; fearful lest this girl of all others should find me unmanned, and as I lean my aching head on my hand I find myself listening, half unconsciously, to their conversation.

“Yes, poor Joscelyn, he was always so

handsome. It is very hard," I hear my mother saying.

"Hard! it is terrible; I cannot conceive anything more dreadful than to be blind; but, dear—he is as handsome as ever; no one would ever imagine those great blue eyes to be sightless," Eveline answers in tones that she tries to make cheerful, but there is the sound of a sob in her voice.

I begin to realise that I ought to go away, to shut my ears to the conversation, but the next words arrest my attention, and chain me to my seat.

"Do you know, Lady Ferrers, I—I once thought he cared for me," Eveline is saying, and then my mother replies in a low heart-broken voice. There is a pause, and as I hear the low, sweet tones saying, "Don't, darling, do not grieve so terribly," I know that the two women are mingling their tears together. For some time my mother continues talking, and when I can distinguish the next words, Eveline is speaking again.

"But why, dear—why should this make any difference?" she says, and then after

a little more conversation I hear my mother's gown trailing across the verandah, and I know that Eveline is alone. A great revulsion of feeling sweeps over me, a wave of joy and hope that causes my heart to beat hotly.

"Surely, surely I heard aright; I can't be mistaken," I whisper, but I stifle the thoughts that are uppermost in my mind. "Bah! What a selfish brute I am—I forgot," I murmur, passing my hand over my eyes; but some instinct leads me on, and I grope my way across the room, and step out through the open window.

"Ah! there you are. I had been wondering what had become of you," and quick light steps come down the verandah towards me, and a gentle hand laid on my arm leads me to my favourite seat.

"It is such a glorious evening. Quite perfect," she says as I lean back in my large bamboo chair.

"Ah! tell me about it," I say, more to gain time, as I try to still my beating heart.

"Away to the right, you know, over the park, the sun is going down a vivid crimson, and there are little puffs of



golden clouds resting over the wood's like the soft curls of Tintoretto's cupids; and the roses, oh! they are so lovely. The whole scene reminds one of those lines:—

Green thing to green in the summer makes answer, and rose  
tree to rose,

Lily by lily the year becomes perfect; and none of us knows

What thing is brightest of all things on earth, as it blossoms and  
blows,

she says, describing so vividly as is her wont.

“I can almost fancy I have my sight back.—And so you are going away to-morrow. What shall I do without my eyes, Fairy?” I say, trying to speak lightly. I have got into the way of calling her by the latter name since she has been with us at Joscelyn, she has done so much to prevent me from feeling my affliction so keenly that I often tell her she is my good fairy; but lightly as I speak my heart is well nigh bursting.

“Yes, I wish I were not going; I wish I could stay with you always,” she answers in a low voice; and again that flood of joy surges over me, sending the quick blood dancing through my veins, and causing my breath to come hard and fast.

"Eveline, do you know what you are saying? Child, do you know what you lead me to think—to hope?" I say, rising and crossing the verandah. I am getting quite an adept at finding my way about now, and, guided by her voice, I walk straight across to where she is standing leaning against one of the Corinthian pillars, and I take one of the small hands.

"You ought to be glad that I am going away. You have forgotten what you once said to me at Malta," she says in low tones.

"Forgotten! I wish to Heaven I could forget," I say vehemently, and as I speak I feel the small hand tremble violently. "Why? Because it is torture to be near and know that I can never be anything to you now. Oh! my darling, and I love you so," and in spite of me the passionate words break forth.

"Then why won't you marry me? Oh! why, why do you make it so hard for me?" she says, and I know that she is crying now.

"Because it would be cruel—a sin—to remind you of a promise made before I

was blind," I say; but the very touch of her gown almost breaks down my resolution to be strong.

"But if I love you, if I cannot be happy without you," she says in low tones. so low that I have to bend my head down to hear, and I do not wait for more, but take her into my arms, and cover her face and hair with passionate kisses.

"Are you sure you will never regret it, Fairy? Never be sorry that you are tied for life to a poor devil who is blind? Ah! I have so little to offer you, sweet—so little—only a heart," I say, as I pass my hand gently over her face, lingeringly, lovingly, loth to leave the beautiful features I remember so well; but a small hand is placed over my mouth.

"Quite sure," she says; and I know by the tone of her voice that she means it—that henceforth and for ever I and my Fairy will never be parted until we cross the border of that unknown world where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, or pain.

MISS MASSAREENES GHOST





## MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

A lighter sin or a lesser error,  
Might change through hope or fear divine—  
But there is no fear, and Hell has no terror  
To change or alter a love like mine.

“By Jove! It looks glorious in the moonlight. Why, it would delight the heart of the veriest Yankee that ever crossed the silver streak in search of the antique,” I say, gazing up at the ancient turreted walls on which the ivy clings in great thick masses above us, as we stand a merry group on the terrace, having strolled out after dinner ostensibly to get a glimpse of the lake by moonlight.

The time of the year is early autumn. The scene Loughrea Castle—the home of the Massareenes, where a large party have assembled for the shooting. As I sweep my eye over the stately building, with its battlemented towers so clearly defined in the soft light of the goddess of night, and turn to my companion, I see an amused

expression flit across her face.

"*Prenez garde!*" she says *sotto voce*, with a warning glance towards the end of the terrace, where a woman in trailing amber and black is standing talking animatedly to a diminutive man with a face resembling a boiled turnip, and a button-like nose, that gives one the impression that it has been sat upon during its infancy and never recovered. "Mrs. Roose is an American, you know, and very charming," continues Miss Massareene, while I anathematise my luck in always saying the wrong thing, as I glance towards the beautiful face of the American woman who has turned towards us.

"Never mind, she did not hear you, you have escaped this time," whispers my companion consolingly, and as she speaks the tall woman in the amber dress—gown I believe they call it—is seized with a violent fit of sneezing, and I hear her say to Dick Massareene, who is standing near, "Oh! I beg your pardon. I guess I splashed you."

No doubt as to her nationality now, and I perceive Massareene's usually imperturb-

able face assumes quite a startled expression, as he answers, "Eh? Oh! Ah! no, not at all, I assure you." He told me afterwards, in the smoking-room, he never felt so staggered in his life. A deadly silence falls upon the party, as one and all we hold our breaths, and avoid each other's eyes for the space of sixty seconds—minutes they seem to me—and I begin to wonder how much longer I can contain my risible faculties; and as I note the agonised expression on Dick's face, the awful presentiment comes to me that I shall presently disgrace my noble country, and the name of Greville, by bursting forth with the irrepressible laughter that is inwardly convulsing me, when Miss Massareene again comes to the rescue.

"Yes, it does look picturesque," she says in her low, soft voice, in which is a suspicion of laughter, as she becomes suddenly interested in the East Tower of the ancient building stretching away to our right. "By-the-by, Colonel Greville, do you believe in ghosts?"

"Ghosts!" I exclaim, as I lean back and give way to unrestrained merriment, only



too thankful to be able to do so, without being guilty of *gaucherie*. (Dick has wisely retreated to the other end of the terrace, where he is apparently gazing with rapt attention at the moonlit gardens below.) "Ghosts? not I; but why do you ask? Do you indulge in a family ghost at Loughrea?"

"Well, no; not quite that," replies Miss Massareene, with a little reproachful glance that banishes my hilarity on the instant; "but there is a haunted room, and you see we did not know that you could come till Dick telegraphed this morning, so we have been obliged to put you in this room. I am so sorry," she concludes with a pretty air of apology, and for a minute the brown eyes look grave and serious. But I hasten to assure her that nothing in the shape of an apparition, commonly termed a ghost, has any terror for me, and I smile grimly at the idea.

"Mrs. Benson, that's our old housekeeper, you know," continues Miss Massareene, "came to me just now looking the picture of woe, because she had to give you the blue room."

"Very considerate of Mrs. Benson, but I don't fancy the ghost will trouble me," I reply smiling. "Do you think the old lady will be very disappointed, if I fail to see anything pertaining to the supernatural?" I say, waxing confidential as I gaze down on the beautiful girlish face before me, with the moonbeams playing hide-and-seek in the great hazel eyes, and casting soft shadows on the Grecian head.

"Ah! it is no joking matter. The house is so full I have given up my own rooms, and do you know I don't even like sleeping in a room that opens out of the same corridor as the blue room; as for that, I wouldn't sleep there not for—for—" she pauses, and the dark eyes grow darker still with the heat of her vehemence.

"The Rajah Doodlepooh himself," I rejoin lightly, as one or two people stroll up to us.

"Dick, I have been telling Colonel Greville that he will have to sleep in the ghost room to-night, and you are to have the dressing-room," Miss Massareene remarks to her brother.

"Ghost! Nonsense, Norine. You must

know, Greville, that my sister firmly believes in that blue room being haunted. She has caught the infection from the housekeeper, and ever since my father came into the place they have never let any-one sleep there. But we'll ghost 'em, won't we?' and as Dick indulges in one of his frank laughs Lady Massareene appears on the terrace.

She is one of the few women I really and sincerely like, and has been more than a mother to me ever since her eldest son Richmond (generally known as Dick) and I had that sharp tussle with the Upper Shinwarries in the Khyber during the November of '79. I see it all before me now as I write—the winding road leading up to the bleak Lundi Kotul, where we were attacked by the hill men, and poor Carew was sent to his long rest by a straggling jezail bullet, another of which so nearly put an end to Massareene. It seems but yesterday that Fraser and I carried the tall youngster down to the clump of trees by the little stream of Lundi Khana, and washed the blood-stains from the fair head, and waited and wondered if the blue eyes

of young Massareene would ever uncloset. Since that day Dick and I have been as brothers, though I am many years his senior, and for the last twelve months we have been away together on a shooting tour in South Africa, where we have been enjoying the ceremony of battle, murder, and sudden death amongst the big game. During our absence Dick's father, the present Sir Ralph Massareene, has come into title and estates, which accounts for this being my first visit to Loughrea.

"*Madre*, come here, we are discussing ghosts," calls Miss Massareene to her mother, and we soon get into an interesting dissertation on the subject as Lady Massareene is accommodated with a chair, and we all lounge about in various attitudes on the terrace. It is a beautiful evening, one of those early autumn evenings that remind us that summer is not quite a thing of the past, as the air still balmy and warm, comes in great whiffs of sweet perfume from the late roses, that are still blooming in the old gardens.

The conversation turns to the possibility of bodies or spirits of the dead rising to



confront those still living. It is a somewhat ghastly subject, but it seems to execute quite a fascination for some of our party, and Agnew of the F.O. becomes very excited as he tries to convert me to his way of thinking.

"Why, it has been proved by philosophers—clearly proved that as a shadowy re-animation, bodies have appeared above their graves, a phenomenon caused by exhalation, owing to fermentation of certain gases in the blood of the corpse," he says, after a long discussion, but notwithstanding his subtle reasoning I remain unconvinced, to his evident chagrin. Story after story is told, and as Wilmer of the "Blues" caps the climax with one that is horribly realistic, and what *la belle Americaine* describes as "hair-raising," Lady Massareene rises with a shudder, and we all come to the conclusion that we have heard enough on the subject of ghosts to last for some time to come, as we troop into the great hall, and see the ladies depart with their candlesticks, not a few of the pretty women looking a trifle pale, and glancing nervously at the statues and armour that line the old oak staircase.

As the last train disappears out of sight, I link my arm in Dick's and we follow the other men to the billiard-room, where we remain for an hour smoking, and watching Sir Francis Fiskens—the man with the sketchy nose—and Sartoris playing a game, after which we too ascend to the regions above. As we go through the form of undressing, Dick and I indulge in an interesting conversation (chiefly concerning the guests in the house) through the open door between our apartments, and I am just about to spring into bed, when laying one, hand on the counterpane, the whole substance sinks, and I discover to my dismay that the bed is a feather one. Now if there is one thing that I detest more than another on the face of the earth, it is sleeping on feathers. It is my *bête noire*, my pet aversion, why, or wherefore, I know not, but the fact remains that I would infinitely prefer to sleep on a cowskin in a kraall, on the grass by a camp fire, or even on the bare floor of my room, rather than on one of those abominable adjuncts of civilisation termed "a feather bed." So I stand, regarding the one before me

with anything but a satisfied air.

"Hang it! What shall I do?" I say to myself, debating whether I shall drag the clothes off, and take up my position for the night on the sofa at the foot of the ancient four-poster. Meanwhile I relieve my feelings by a long low whistle, which brings Massareene into my room in a hurry, for we have not shared one another's camp, cabin, etc., for the past twelve months, without his being quite cognisant of my favourite signal of distress.

"What's up, old boy? ' he says, appearing in the doorway, as economically attired as a Matabele native.

"Well, you see," I begin with a rueful look at the bed, "it—it's feathers."

"So it is. What a bore!" he replies, testing the downy structure before us, by deliberately conveying his stalwart frame plump into the midst of it—a proceeding that brings me to a lower stage of melancholy than before, as it reduces my prospect of sleeping comfortably to a minimum.

"Let us see. What's to be done?" says Dick; then, after a pause, he exclaims, "I have it. You shall sleep in the dressing-

room, and I'll stay here."

For a minute I hesitate, not wishing to give trouble, but Massareene will not take "no," and bustling about he carries some of my goods and chattels into the adjoining room, whither I follow. Turning back one of the massive shutters, I open the window, and retire to bed—this time everything being to my satisfaction. Notwithstanding which fact, however, I remain for some time with wakeful eyes. Perhaps my restlessness is caused by the noise of the rats, that seem to be holding high jinks and having quite a festive time behind the old carved wainscotting. Ye gods! How they racket! patter, patter up and down they go, enjoying their nightly revels to my great discomfiture, or perchance I am kept awake by the vision of two laughing brown orbs, and a rosy kissable mouth, that comes before me every time I close my eyes. Whatever be the cause, Morpheus has not treated me well to-night, and sleep having deserted me I fall into a reverie, and lie with my eyes fixed dreamily on the bright flood of moonlight that is streaming in through the open window,



## 236 MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

and I find myself wondering how it is that I have never before discovered the charms of my host's beautiful daughter, whom I so recently left a somewhat shy schoolgirl, and return from my trip abroad to find a graceful member of society, with as many charms as Psyche herself.

One—two—I hear the great stable clock boom out, and I smile at my own weakness, as the thought flashes across me, how astonished many a society belle would be if she could fathom the state of my mind at the present moment, for hitherto I have been proof against the wiles of women. Now, after one evening's conversation with pretty Norine Massareene, I am utterly and completely vanquished, and was never so fascinated before, though I hardly like to own it even to myself as yet. Intending to go off to sleep without any further delay, I resolutely determine to think no more of the brown-eyed syren who has bewitched me, so I am just about to turn over, and settle myself more comfortably, when my attention is arrested by the movement of the door leading into the corridor, as the handle turns—and, behold!

a white-robed figure glides in. Crossing the room swiftly with little bare noiseless feet, she stands beside my bed, and says pantingly with short catches of breath, "Dick! Dick, wake up, I want you!" I begin to think I am dreaming, that the small figure before me must be some phantom of my restless brain, a fantastic fancy, or mere imaginary form that will fade away, and leave me with only a delicious recollection of what is past. Fearful of disturbing the illusion, expectant every moment of seeing it vanish away as many a dream, 'too flattering sweet to be substantial,' has done before, I lie, not daring to move, with every muscle still, my head snuggled partly below the quilt. I can clearly see her standing there between me and the moonlit window, in her dainty *robe de nuit*, with her fair hair flowing in great rippling waves far below her waist. The brown eyes are full of unshed tears, making them in finitely wistful and tender—such a contrast to the red saucy mouth, that looks as if life were made up of one long jest—I can see her breast rising in great undulating waves, as leaning forward she lays a little

hand on my shoulder.

"Oh, Dick! do wake up, I am so frightened!" she says imploringly, with a half sob, and I note that the oval face is as white as the soft laces clinging round the shapely throat. Pushing the clothes from my face hastily, I sit upright, now fully aware that the white-robed figure before me is no phantom, but Miss Massareene herself. Regardless of my embarrassing position, heedless of the fact that I am not Miss Massareene's brother, I sit up in bed, the one object before my mind being, that she is in distress.

"Miss Massareene! what is it? Can I help you?" I exclaim in astonishment, ready for any emergency, fire, burglars, or a midnight visit from those scoundrelly moonlighters. For the space of a minute the white frightened face stares at me then the brown eyes open wider still, as an expression of dismay steals into them, and the warm crimson surges hotly over her face and neck.

"I—I—thought it was Dick!" she murmurs almost inaudibly—then turning, glides away, as swiftly as she came, leaving me

with only the open door to convince me that I have not been dreaming. There is a murmur of voices in the adjoining room, then a door opens, and I hear footsteps retreating down the corridor. Jumping out of bed, I struggle into some slippers and hasten into the next room, but only to find it empty: so I conclude that Dick has gone to his sister's aid. All sleep is banished from my eyes, and I am not a little curious as to what has terrified Miss Massareene; but though I open the door and make an expedition into the corridor, all is still. So there is nothing for it but to return to my room and await Dick's return.

Lighting a cigar, I lean out of the window, and look down on the great gardens below. Not a sound breaks the stillness, save the melancholy hoot of an owl, as it floats by, and the sharp tap-tapping against the window of a spray of ivy mingling with the shrill cry of a bat, which, attracted by the light, sweeps down and then continues its career into some dark cranny of the ancient building. Some ten minutes pass when, hearing the sound



of returning footsteps, I throw away my cigar, and hasten into the adjoining room.

"What's wrong, Massareene? Has anything happened?" I say, going up to him as he stalks in, attired in a long dressing-gown, the waist-cord of which drags disconsolately behind.

"Awfully sorry you have been disturbed, old fellow; but Norine heard a curious noise in her room, and was frightened," he says, putting the candlestick he is holding, down slowly.

"What was it, rats?" I ask, thinking of those little pests which have been disturbing me for so long. For a second or two he does not answer; then he says with a grave deliberation, very unusual to him, and looking a little preplexed:—

"Well, curiously enough, though I heard it, I can't discover what it is; however, Norine has gone to sleep with Mrs. Roose, so I shan't bother any more about it"; but his manner has roused my curiosity, so I announce my intention of going in search of the mysterious noise, and in spite of remonstrances I am soon following him down the long corridor, where here and

there the moonlight is creeping in, making some of the bygone Massareenes appear more ghastly than usual, as it rests on courtly dame in powder and patches, with her gallant knight smiling beside her. As we near a door at the far end of the corridor, my companion pauses. "Hark! do you hear anything?" he whispers, and as we stand listening I distinctly become conscious of a distant rumbling sound. For some seconds it continues with a regularity that is mysterious, and not to be attributed to anything so frivolous as rats.

"Very odd. It certainly does not sound like rats," I say, as the long-continued rumble dies away, and pushing open the door we enter. The room like most of the others in the old castle, is somewhat sombre, with deep oriel windows. Everything points to the hand of Time. A high carved wainscot runs round the room, like the broad rafters crossing the ceiling, black with age, as also are the boards beyond the square of carpet in the centre, and it is a relief to turn one's eyes from these heavy antiquities to the more modern belongings of the late dainty occupier. On the

dressing-table a Tantalus scent case stands guard over Venetian hand-mirrors, and silver-backed brushes, with the initials N. E.M. Everything is just as Miss Massareene left it in her hurried flight, and I find myself gazing almost reverently at a pile of neatly-folded garments on a chair, beneath which a tiny pair of shoes (nearly all heel and buckle, with pointed toe enough to make a fashionable doctor's hair, of the present day, stand on end) peep out. On the writing-table there is a great bowl of roses, and the air is filled with a faint, subtle perfume, suggestive of Daphne. Round the room we go together, Dick and I, peering under the bed, beneath the tables, and into the cavernous recesses of the huge wardrobe, dark as Erebus, examining every nook and cranny, but there is no clue to the mystery. Standing in a corner of the room is the parrot Dick has so lately brought home for his sister, and I even go so far as to move the cage, a liberty the occupier resents by flapping its wings and uttering a series of screeches calculated to ruin the tympanum of most ears, and I am thankful enough to beat a hasty retreat

from the vicinity, as the parrot relieves its injured feelings by wildly shrieking, "You beast," and other opprobrious epithets that the sailors have taught it *en route* to England.

"Disrespectful old bird," I mutter, somewhat nettled, while a subdued chuckle in the rear tells me that my companion is indulging in unseemly mirth at my discomfiture. But though we search diligently, all our efforts are in vain, there is no clue to the mysterious noise.

"Well, there is nothing here. Ghost, or whatever it was, has disappeared," I say gloomily, as we come to a standstill, and regard each other with a puzzled stare.

"Ah! but that sound only comes when it is dark, that is the curious part of it," and crossing the room Massareene extinguishes the candle, and we stand waiting breathlessly for the result. Presently it comes.

"Listen! There it is again," whispers Dick excitedly, and sure enough that weird rumble is repeated. It seems to be quite close to us—at our feet, and then to recede, with the same peculiar regularity



that is, to say the least, extraordinary. Hastily we relight the candle, and rush to the place where we imagine the noise last proceeded from, but there is nothing there save a low chair and shining expanse of polished floor. Three times we go through this performance, and always with the same result. Every time the light appears the sounds cease.

"What the dickens can it be? I say at length, as Massareene yawns sleepily, and suggests the advisability of returning to bed, but I am determined not to be baffled; so easily, so resolve not to return to my room until I have elucidated the mystery, and as we Massareene insists on remaining with me, settle ourselves in two comfortable chairs and, extinguishing the candle, agree to keep watch. Before many minutes pass a prolonged snore tells me that my companion has fallen asleep, and I am left to my lonely vigil. Once again I make a tour of the room, surreptitiously appropriating a rose that I find amongst the trinkets on the table during my peregrinations, after which, again being unsuccessful, I take up my position, and

wait for daylight. Still those weird uncanny sounds continue, pausing ever and anon, and then beginning with that regular mysterious rumble. Half an hour passes, when I find to my disgust that I too begin to feel sleepy. *Pour passer le temps*, and to keep myself awake, I set to whistling an air from 'Dorothy,' and have just got 'You are queen of my heart to-night' entirely to my satisfaction, when that tantalising noise begins afresh, but, tired of searching, I continue whistling, when——Heavens! what is that? and I am startled by seeing a small black object moving across the ray of moonlight that is streaming over the floor through a window that I have unshuttered. On it goes slowly till it disappears into the dim light beyond the influence of the moon. Springing to my feet I fling my slipper in the direction of the unknown, but the former misses its mark, and once more as I watch I see the small black object cross the ray of moonlight. This time it creeps towards me, and I see to my utter amazement that it is an ordinary black glass bottle traversing the floor. For a

full minute I stand regarding the curious phenomenon of a bottle moving across the room, to all appearance untouched by human hand. On it goes across the boards, with a slow regular movement—no machine could go more steadily—and a faint rumble caused by its contact with the floor, till, coming against a corner of the wardrobe, it ceases for a moment, and then commences its backward career—a career that is instantly nipped in the bud by me, as I pounce upon it and examine it by the light of the candle. Apparently it is only a common bottle. Turning it upside down, I shake it vigorously, but nothing appears but a few stray seeds of maize. Even as I hold it lightly in my hand it seems to be going through a series of small jerks, causing me to speculate wildly as to the reason, when the expedient occurs to me of holding it up to the light.

There stands revealed the cause of Miss Massareene's alarm, and the object that has disturbed three people for the night; and I confess that I never felt more disgusted in my life when I became

aware of the contents of the bottle. It is nothing more than a beastly mouse that has been perambulating the room for the last two hours. It has evidently got into the bottle, and become a prisoner, owing to the maize filling up the neck, as it rolled along the floor, and, knowing little animal, it had the sense to remain still whenever a light appeared, which, combined with the reason that the old oak boards were about the same colour as the bottle, made it almost impossible to be detected. However, the mystery is solved at last. "Bah! you little beggar," I say, as I relieve my feelings by shaking the bottle vigorously, whereupon sundry squeaks issue from the interior; after which I turn my attention to Dick, who is still snoring comfortably.

"Ten thousand fleas!" he murmurs sleepily, as I administer a slight shaking, and six minutes pass before I succeed in convincing him that we are not camping by the Limpopo, and that I, Gordon Greville, late of Her Majesty's —th Regiment, am not a rascally native; an indignity I bear with serenity, as I flourish the



bottle, and exclaim triumphantly, "I've got him! Wake up, Dick!"

When Massareene does come to his proper senses, he, like myself, is not a little astonished and mortified.

"Well, of all the disgusting frauds. Done brown by a mouse," he says at length, as the ludicrous side of the affair presents itself; and, leaning back, we laugh long and heartily, and my companion announces his intention of having "no end of a good time in quizzing his sister in the morning"—a proposition that reduces me to instant gravity, as I think of that little white terrified figure standing by my bed.

"Look here, Dick," I say, "it'll never do for this affair to get about the house. It will be awfully awkward for your sister. Of course, for myself I do not care a bit; but it is so different for a girl. Our best plan will be to keep dark," an argument that Massareene is not slow to accept.

"Yes, it might be a little uncomfortable for Norine," he acknowledges; "but how about Mrs. Roose? She is sure to talk."

"Oh! send a line to your sister directly your man calls you. Tell her we agreed

not to mention the subject," I say, hastening off just as the daylight is making an appearance.

"All right. Mum's the word," replies Dick, following suit; and, tired out, we are soon in bed, and sleeping the sleep of the just.

"Good morning, Colonel Greville; come and sit here," and Lady Massareene points smilingly to the vacant chair on her left, as I enter to find a large cheery party assembled at breakfast. It is a thoroughly representative house party, and, though the hour is somewhat earlier than usual, most of the younger women staying in the house have joined us. Every one seems to know every one, and even that inveterate old grumbler, General Bumbledore, is compelled for once to be frivolous, and join in the fun and badinage that takes place on all sides. As I glance round the table, and laughingly reply to Sartoris, who is informing Mrs. Roose, in a stage whisper, as he looks across at the pile of letters by my plate, that "there is nothing like safety in numbers," with what

I tell him is a very impertinent insinuation, —I notice that Miss Massareene is amongst those still absent, and I become conscious of a distinct feeling of disappointment as time goes on and she does not appear. Every time the door opens I glance towards it but she does not come, till, at length, keeping my eyes on my devilled kidneys, I venture to inquire of my hostess what has become of Miss Massareene.

“Oh! Norine, she has just sent to say that she was lazy this morning, so won't be down till the second breakfast. Rather an unusual thing for René,” she says, as she turns to greet one of the late arrivals, who have kept me on tenterhooks all the breakfast time. Looking across the table I catch an amused glance from Mrs. Roose, which causes me to indulge in a faint smile beneath my moustache, as I once more became absorbed in the contents of my plate. Half-an-hour later we assemble in the hall, ready equipped for our day amongst the grouse, and are soon tramping, a party of fifteen, beneath the old elms, where the rooks are cawing lustily.

Several ladies have assembled under the

portico to watch our departure, and as we turn, for a final wave of the hand, before a bend in the avenue hides the lower part of the castle from view, I see a slight figure standing beside old Lady Wilmer, that looks uncommonly like Miss Massareene.

"Hurrah! for the heather! Good luck to ye, my boy!" exclaims Dick, as, after two hours' hard walking, the dogs are uncoupled, and we split up into twos and threes, and prepare for sport. 'Tis a splendid morning. A cool, fresh breeze is waving the purple blossoms of the heather, and driving away the mists that hang like a veil over the dark-wooded sides of Slieve-dhu, making invisible the tall crest of the mountain towering skywards. Overhead there is an unbroken vista of clear blue, save where a mighty eagle is cleaving his way, and a flight of fourteen swifts are rushing together—a long line of black dots in the far-off blue ether. All round there is a peaceful quiet; no sound breaking the stillness but the humming of bees in the heather, and the twittering of a pair of little wrens with tip-tilted tails, set straight on end—which are flirting unin-



interruptedly on a boulder to my left, as they revel in the sun-god's kisses.

As I stalk on across the glen, I see the dogs ranging before me over the heather. Just in front is old Rattler scenting the wind, with the sleek glossy form of his faithful companion backing splendidly behind.

Whirr—whir-r-r!—and at the cry of a cock, a couple of feathered beauties rise over my head, the dogs drop down, and I raise the faithful old Purdey that has done me such good service at home and in foreign lands.

Bang, bang, I let fly; and presently I become keenly alive to the fact that I have been guilty of a disgraceful miss. All day it is very much the same. Verily, the gods have treated me badly I think, as we tramp over the heather, and at lunch, for the first time in my life I have occasion to feel ashamed of my bag. Having refreshed the inner man and indulged in an hour's rest and smoke, we set off again. This time Massareene consigns me to the charge of his favourite man, Mike Maloney, but the change does not seem to benefit me much. My luck is evidently

out for the day, and I fear I do not rise in the estimation of that worthy individual as the afternoon passes, and I fail to bring down various birds that should, undoubtedly, in the ordinary course of events, have fallen to my gun.

He is very good-natured about it, I must confess; and as a brood rises close under my nose, and I again miss, he scratches his bushy head of hair, and I hear him mutter —

“The blessed Saints be praised. Och, it only required half a wink to bring 'em down.” I feel it devolves upon me to make some explanation.

“Confound it!” I ejaculate, as the birds fly away unharmed; and turning to Mike, I save my reputation by letting him into the secret of my disturbed night, as we set off for our rendezvous at the foot of Slieve-dhu.

“Shure, it's no wonder at all, at all, that ye can't shoot the day, wid purty Miss Norine that terrified, and ye up the greater part of the night listening to the banshee,” he replies, in an awestruck voice, with an ominous shake of the head,

that speaks volumes — superstitious, like most of his countrymen, quite ignoring the fact that the banshee resolved itself into a mouse.

“No wonder at all,” I agree, thinking of a white-robed figure that has been haunting me all day.

As the evening mists again descend over the mountain, Dick and I shoulder our guns and trudge homewards; and I relieve my feelings by a comforting grumble at the ill-luck that has attended me throughout the day.

On coming in sight of the castle we set to discussing the event of last night, and Massareene laughs again over the completeness of our sell, as he says:—

“You should have seen Norine’s face when I told her about the mouse. She was shy about meeting you this morning, so would not come down.”

A picturesque sight meets our eyes as we enter the great hall. Here and there stand groups of men in shooting clothes, who had evidently just come in—knickerbockered and gaitered—talking to women in faultless tweed gowns; the bright faces

and soft laughter of the many pretty girls staying in the house forming a pleasing contrast to the sombre carving and somewhat heavy style of the old oak-panelled hall. There is only one woman that I care particularly to see; and, as I glance rapidly round, I have the satisfaction of knowing that for once my desire is gratified. Presiding over a tea-table near the fireplace is Miss Massareene herself, forming as goodly a sight as any fellow could wish to see on a long day's march. A last ray of the setting sun has stolen in through the stained-glass window, and is kissing the tiny cupids, dyeing the royal blue of the Worcester cups all manner of fantastic colours, and lighting up the ruby dagger that fastens the spray of heather at Miss Massareene's throat.

On the rug at her feet old Bay, the great sleuthhound, lies dozing, now and then blinking an indolent, contemptuous look in the direction of a wiry fox terrier, that is galloping about in a frivolous state of excitement, concerning several bits of cake looming in the distance, with which he hopes to regale his epigastrium.

Three or four men are standing near the



## 256 MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

table, and being questioned by several ladies as to the result of the day's sport; some minutes pass before I am free to cross the room and greet Miss Massareene. She gives me a little white hand, and bends over the cups as if her life depended on her filling them satisfactorily. Never once has she looked at me; resolutely the lids close over the tell-tale eyes beneath, as I rattle on about various matters. Some minutes pass, and I see to my secret exultation that she is beginning to feel more at her ease; as in the middle of a description of an exciting tiger hunt, the brown eyes glance shyly at me from under the long fringed lashes—lashes which curl upwards as if unwilling to cast the veriest suspicion of a shadow or veil the splendour of the limpid depths below—and I congratulate myself on my tact, when old Sir Ralph Massareene comes across to the table, with some more of the sportsmen, and by a chance remark sends all my secret exultation to the four winds.

“Why, René, I have not seen you before to-day. What prevented my little girl from coming to give me my coffee this morning?” he says, as he stoops and kisses her, and

as she once more turns her attention to the tea the hot crimson rushes up in a great crimson wave till her very ears become suffused. I try to appear as if unconscious of her embarrassment, and long with all my heart to be able to help her, and as I speculate how best to accomplish this some one touches my elbow, and turning I see Mrs. Roose armed with a dumpy cream-jug and a little squat sugar-basin.

"Here, Colonel Greville, sugar yourself, and I'll cream you. I guess you want your tea," she says in her bright, irresistible way, handing me the sugar and pouring in the cream liberally.

"Thanks, how good of you! I adore cream," I say laughingly, with a grateful glance, for I am perfectly aware it is to screen her friend's embarrassment that she has come forward. When I turn again, Miss Massareene is surrounded by a group of men, and I do not get an opportunity of speaking to her alone again this evening. Is it fancy on my part, I wonder? but it certainly appears as if she avoided me, a notion that causes me to indulge in no less than three cigars as I sit by my open

## 258 MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

window ruminating far into the night.

The next day passes, and my fancy of last night becomes reality. There is no doubt about the matter whatever. Miss Massareene treats me with a studied avoidance that is maddening, and when the third day comes to an end and she avoids me on every possible pretext, I come to the conclusion that my wisest plan will be to make the excuse of pressing business and return to London without delay. Hard hit as I undoubtedly am, I have sense enough left to realise that it will be better to take my departure before I sink deeper into the mire.

I begin to wish I had never come to Loughrea; to hate the very name of ghost, and, keen sportsman as I have been all my life, to regard my day amongst the grouse as rather a bore—small wonder when my sight is affected and my mind distracted by a fair oval face that will come stealing before me.

Everything seems to have lost its freshness. The very heather that I have loved since I was a boy appears now as Dead Sea fruit—in fact I realise the significance

of the expression, "the most miserable devil on earth." It is the evening of the third day, and dinner over I am standing on the terrace smoking quite alone, some fifteen minutes ago having declined to accompany several of the others into the gardens below. Every now and then the sound of merry laughter is borne to me on the small night wind. I am in the most miserable mood, and my temper has not been improved by the sight of Miss Massareene disappearing down a moonlit walk with Sartoris and Fiskens. As I stand biting the end of my moustache, and meditating over the arrangements for my departure on the morrow, Lady Massareene steps through the open drawing-room window which leads on to the terrace. Quickly she glances to the right and left, then uttering a little vexed murmur she turns, and is about to re-enter the house, when politeness compels me to go forward and inquire if I can help her.

"Ah, yes! would you find Norine and give her this?" she says, holding out a little soft fleecy shawl with quite a relieved air, and I murmur something about 'pleasure' and depart on my unwished for errand.



## 260 MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

I have not proceeded far when I meet with two very disconsolate specimens of humanity.

"Have you seen Miss Massareene? Where is she?" I inquire somewhat shortly, for my temper is still ruffled.

"That's just what we want to know. She went to speak to her brother," replied Sartoris gloomily.

"Yes, and she only went over there, but we cannot find her anywhere," adds Fiskens with a nod towards the shrubberies, and I fancy the button-like nose looks more depressed than usual, as I continue my way across the sloping lawns, feeling a keen sense of satisfaction at their discomfiture. Through the shrubbery, across the rose-garden with its old moss-grown sundial; in and out the intricacies of the maze I wander, disturbing flirtations—whereat those concerned glare at me reproachfully—meeting half the people staying in the house it seems to me; but no Miss Massareene can I find, and, coming to the conclusion that she must have gone in, I am about to return to the house, when I catch the flutter of a

white gown trailing on the lawn beneath one of the giant cedars on the lower terrace. A clump of evergreens hides the rest of the figure, but thinking it must be Miss Massareene I continue my way down the long flight of steps across the lawns, and, turning round a group of shrubs, come upon the object of my search, and—a scene that brings me to a halt on the instant.

There sure enough stands the slender figure of Miss Massareene. She is leaning on the parapet near one of the great urns filled with scarlet geraniums, and beside her is a tall young man with—his arm round her waist.

“Ah! this accounts for everything,” I think, shutting my teeth hard as a great wave of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness sweeps across me, leaving me more miserable than before as I stand irresolute. I long to be able to rush forward and annihilate the owner of that arm. Who can it be? I wonder, as I run over most of the men staying in the house, but arrive at no satisfactory conclusion. They are conversing together in a subdued tone of

voice, evidently enjoying their stolen interview to the utmost. Shall I go back, or not? I hesitate; then as a silvery laugh comes across the lawn, I continue my way, taking a sort of savage pleasure in disturbing the lovers. As I stride across the grass fuming inwardly, and wondering who the lucky beggar can be, a twig snaps beneath my foot, and, turning, the tall young man exclaims—

“Hullo! Why, it's Greville!” and I see to my utter amazement that the mysterious individual is no other than Dick: a fact I should have become aware of long ago, only my mad jealousy blinded me to such an extent that I was incapable of seeing anything, save in a perverted fashion.

For a minute I stand too astonished to utter a word, as a great feeling of remorse steals over me for having misjudged her; then, with an effort, I pull myself together, and go forward with the shawl, and tell her with a faint smile that I have just met two such disconsolate young men on the lawn—a remark that causes Dick evident amusement, as he proceeds to give me a lively description as to the manner

in which he has aided and abetted his sister in flight from boredom. As I listen, a doubt enters my mind. Can I have been mistaken after all? Speech seems to have deserted me strangely, and my heart beats wildly as it never beat before with a flutter of hope.

She looks so beautiful standing there in the moonlight—so beautiful, that a great longing fills my soul to have her near me all through the years to come. A little silence falls upon us, which is broken by Massareene—

"This night, methinks, is but the daylight sick,  
It looks a little paler; 'tis a day  
Such as a day is when the sun is hid,"

he says, astonishing us not a little, for poetry and Massareene lie as far apart as the zones.

"Really, Dick, you make me anxious. Is anything the matter with you?" inquires Miss Massareene, assuming a sweet grave manner that is belied by the suspicious quiver about the corners of her mouth.

"Oh no! a mere nothing. It's a little way I have. I am quite well," he says airily, with an amusing intonation of humility,



at which we all laugh, in a subdued fashion.

"What a mountebank you are, Dick! You've quite mistaken your vocation in life," replies Norine, with a loving glance at her brother that does not escape me. For a minute, Dick regards me curiously, and then departs with the avowed intention of seeing if the lower gate is shut.

It certainly is a glorious night. A tiny wind steals over the land—from the top of Slieve-dhu standing afar off, silent and unfathomable—it creeps down to the flowers, and lifts the heads of the passionate poppies, that have 'sinned in their love for the sun,' and ripples the moonbeams lying asleep on the bosom of the lake. No sound is to be heard but the distant bellowing of the deer in the park, mingling with the shrill cries of a flock of plover flying overhead, and the sleepy chirp of a bird in its leafy nest in the old cedar. Another silence falls upon us, during which I watch, almost jealously, a baby moonbeam—a little, inquisitive fairy, that has wandered down through a space between the leaves, and is dancing lightly over the soft wavy hair of my

companion, and then Miss Massareene speaks.

"Ah!" she says, with a long-drawn sigh of content, reluctantly taking her eyes from the scene before us, "what a perfect night! It is such a pity to leave it. But it grows late," and she gathers up her gown, and turns.

"Don't go yet. Why are you always so anxious to get away from me? At least give me this little time, for I am leaving Loughrea to-morrow," I say hastily, in my agitation, laying a hand on her arm, as she prepares to depart.

"Going away! To leave Loughrea—so soon?" she says, turning to me with a startled look of regret stealing across her face, and my heart gives a great bound as the knowledge comes to me that she is more than a little bit sorry.

"Yes, I must return to London to-morrow, and I wanted so much to ask you to—to—forgive me for what happened the other night. It was all my fault," I say miserably.

For a few seconds she does not answer, then, as her face crimson, she averts her

eyes.

"Forgive you?" she says at length. "Ah, no! thank you, you mean. I can never be too grateful to you for your goodness in not mentioning that dreadful night," and, as she hastily puts up one hand to her face, I see her eyes are full of tears, and I feel a brute for having mentioned the subject as I hasten to punish myself.

"But you forget, if I had not been so fastidious about that wretched bed, the mistake would never have happened," I say gloomily.

"Ah! it was not your fault, but it was such a stupid—a shameful thing for me to do—it has made me uncomfortable ever since," she says gently, with a little catching of the breath.

"Norine, there is one way of making it all right," I say, breathlessly watching her, as I take possession of a small hand, and I hesitate before throwing my last stake. Then I whisper softly, "Will you marry me?" and I feel her hand tremble violently, as quickly she glances at me, with a frightened expression in the large innocent eyes, the result of my vehemence,

and the strange sensation of shyness that is stealing over her, born from the impulse of love, but she does not say "no," so I take her into my strong arms, and those silent watchers above in the heavens look down upon a little scene, which is quite an old story to them, witnesses as they have been ever since the creation. For a minute she is too startled or too happy to resist, as I kiss the sweet mobile face, then she steps back, and pushes me from her with little trembling hands.

"Ah, no, not that!" she says with a little mournful smile, that goes to my heart, "you must not marry me for pity. I could not bear it," and I feel that I could laugh aloud in my joyousness if that is her only reason for sending me from her. But it is not before I have told her of all my misery during the last three days, and laid bare the reason of my intended hasty departure, that I can convince her.

"Are you quite sure—quite sure?" she says, a little unsteadily, at last, as the colour steals back to the white face, and there, under the old cedar, she gives in, and makes me happy by telling me that



## 268 MISS MASSAREENE'S GHOST

she has loved me ever since I came to say 'good-bye' the night before going abroad, a year ago. Half an hour later, Dick returns—the lower gate having taken an extraordinary time in shutting—and as he gives my hand a hearty grip he declares that it has all come about through Miss Massareene's Ghost.

FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH



## FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

Tis not the Stoics' lesson got by rote,  
The pomp of words, and pedant dissertation,  
That can support thee in that hour of terror.  
Books have taught cowards to talk nobly of it,  
But when the trial comes—they start and stand aghast

“Dark as Erebus! Raining cats and dogs! Not a sign of any human habitation. Probably no dinner fit to eat when we get there! It is a festive look out,” this with an air of dejection, as Captain the Hon. Oliver Meredith’s usually imperturbable face assumes a dismal expression very foreign to it, for gloom and frivolous “Nolly” are as far apart as the zones; so intensely depressed is his appearance at the present moment that I with difficulty control my risible faculties as I watch him shut the window with a vicious bang, which is almost too much for the antedeluvian leather strap he holds in his hand.

It is a marvel it has not been rent in twain!

The prospect is certainly not a wildly



exhilarating one, and as we rattle along over the rough uneven road, I experience sundry qualms of conscience for having induced Nolly to leave the beaten track to visit such an out-of-the-way place as Vedrillo, instead of going on from Somonca—our last stopping-place—to Vizera, whilst that little speech of his concerning pabulum makes me somewhat apprehensive, and slightly uncomfortable.

Not that I admit to any such thing, for if Nolly descends much lower in the scale of this unusual depression, he may even—appalling thought—give way to tears, and I realise that it behoves me to make the best of things and avert such an embarrassing contretemps, so I assume a serene demeanour as if a certain sensation, vulgarly known as a “sinking”—which sets me yearning for the fleshpots in the substantial shape of grilled steaks and Bass—were a thing unknown, or at any rate not to be remembered just now.

“Don’t look so miserable, old fellow. The little shower will soon be over and we cannot have much further to go. Vedrillo must be awfully picturesque, judging from

Bellew's sketches last year, and if not quite all our fancy paints it, we can but move on again to-morrow," I say cheerfully, taking no notice of a gust of wind and a storm of hail, which at this juncture patters against the carriage—"shandradan" would better describe our present ramshackle vehicle—and getting my sentences out in a series of undignified jerks, valiantly suppressing the fact that I have bitten my tongue horribly as the old rattletrap gives a lurch and a bump which sends me flying on to the opposite seat, into Nolly's arms, with apparent designs upon his nasal extremity, and convinces us more than ever that the cushions are—well—not quite as soft as they might be.

They are in fact distinctly hard, straw being their internal economy, and I hear Meredith ejaculate with an ironical chuckle.

"'Little 'shower' Oh, come! Very like a whale! Why, the clouds have been hard at it for the last three hours. It's about the most Drenching Downpour I've ever set eyes on!" wrathfully.

The capitals are too much for me. I collapse; and the emphatic assertion being

## 274 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

only too true, I refrain from combating it.

Once more a solemn silence descends upon us.

In truth I am wishing that such a person as Bellew had never been born, or at least that I had never looked upon those sketches which he proudly exhibited to us—his brother officers—on his return to "Gib," he having spent a fortnight last year on a sketching tour in Spain, and which afore-mentioned sketches have been the means of bringing us to this remote part of this fair land of vines and sunshine.

Vines and sunshine indeed!

Both are conspicuous by their absence, for long before darkness came on, we have traversed rough roads, with here and there an ominous cross by way of variety, to remind us that we are in the region of the once famous banditti.

A series of bare plains, with no sign of life save an eagle or vulture soaring on high; a long train of mules winding over the track, and no sound save the tinkle of the mule bells, or perchance the hoarse bellowing from a herd of

Andalusian bulls in training for the arena, make me mentally dub myself a perfect idiot for allowing such artistic fads as Bellew's to influence me.

Ten, fifteen minutes pass; a violent jerk and a cessation of the rattling tell us that the shandradan has arrived at a standstill.

Have the noble animals come to an untimely end? Alarming thought!

Hastily I open the window, and peer out, while Nolly promptly follows suit at the opposite side.

The rain has ceased, but the clouds seem to be still having a festive time, as great masses sweep over the distant mountains which stand out solemn and majestic, dimly visible in the gleam of a watery moon, which peeps out from a bank of angry scudding *cumuli* as the storm fiend vanishes away to the South.

Mustering my choicest Spanish it is a poor thing at best—I am just about to enquire how much further we have to go to reach the *fonda* our driver has undertaken to bring us to, when we once more set off, and I perceive we are entering what appears to be a narrow valley at



## 276 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

the far end of which I dimly discern a lonely building at the foot of the mountains.

"All right, Nolly! Hurrah! We're nearly there. There's no deception this time," I say.

Sure enough, another five minutes brings us in front of a gloomy building.

Having knocked with noise enough to wake the dead, a Spaniard appears, and after a short colloquy with our *cocher*, we are ushered into a room where a small charcoal fire is smouldering.

"What a rum place," Nolly observes graphically, but inelegantly, as we proceed to warm our cold hands and numbed limbs. It is a positive luxury to stretch ourselves after that hideous shandrydan, especially as we are both blessed with a superabundance of leg.

We left Somonca soon after lunch. It is now long past eight.

Small wonder Meredith looks gloomy, and as I stand before the fire our comfortable mess-room, with its cheery laughter and badinage, will come stealing before me and I entertain a sneaking longing for *poulets grillés aux champignons*—a dish our

*chef* prepares in a way peculiarly his own. I have just arranged (mentally) the course "our fellows," have arrived at, when the innkeeper appears, and in villainous French inquires whether we object to sharing a double-bedded room, there being one all ready he avers for the Señors to step into. It is not the first time that Nolly and I have been stable companions, and I assure our host it makes no difference. Summoning all the *suaviter in modo* I possess, I request that he will furnish us with something to eat speedily.

The "little sinking" has reached suddenly such a stage that I am capable of disguising it no longer.

"Come along, Nolly. Let us get freshened up for dinner," I say, and together we follow the Spaniard down a long stone-paved passage, and are ushered into a large room on the ground floor.

"It certainly is a queer sort of inn," I observe as the door closes, and once more we are alone.

"Appears uncommonly like one of His Majesty's prisons—however, even that would have been acceptable under the circum-

## 278 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

stances. It is at least a satisfaction that we have arrived somewhere," Nolly returns laughingly, as he unpacks his soap and sluices his handsome head in the tiny basin, making as much splashing and spluttering over his ablutions as a walrus.

"Smells awfully mouldy,"—sniff—"don't you think"—sniff—"there is a musty odour about the place?" I ask as I get into my slippers, and regard the scant furniture and gloomy appearance of the room generally.

The windows are high up; deep sunken into the wall, and the wooden shutters are barred with more than one thick iron rod.

"Well, now you mention it—there is a peculiar smell. Damp perhaps. Let us order a fire. I do hate those beastly stoves," Nolly says briskly.

"So do I, and smelly places are my abomination. What a misfortune it is to be born with a sensitive nose. It makes one's life a burden sometimes," I answer growlingly, as I link my arm in Meredith's and we go back to the other room, where a steaming bowl of soup waits on the table.

It is not at all bad, though if not so famished its garlic would certainly be too much for us.

Meredith having finished his with wonderful alacrity tackles the next dish. I notice he does not appear quite happy over it, but struggles on till some vegetable is handed to him. After this his appetite deserts him! Nothing daunted, however, I follow suit. The meat, though tough, is tolerably good.

It cannot be that which has offended Nolly's palate, but I notice his bread appears to possess hitherto undiscovered charms for him.

"Try the foliage. Whatever it is—awfully good. Don't scruple. I've finished; take some more," he says generously, if feebly, munching away still at his bread.

All unconscious in my innocence, I eat a good mouthful of the garden stuff.

Oh! Phœbus! The taste can be likened to nothing I have ever eaten before, and a twinkle in Meredith's eye tells me he is enjoying a lively sense of satisfaction at my discomfiture, as I motion the Spaniard to remove my plate.



"Ye gods! Rotten olive oil, and putrid goat's flesh. How could you, Nolly? You beggar! Such a mean advantage," I gasp wrathfully,—

"That all! I thought it was human flesh kept for a fortnight, or at least cat," he returns mildly, with revolting equanimity.

"Meredith," I begin sternly—that taste rankles still. "Your entertaining remarks are usually of the highest order. This time, however, you've surpassed yourself—I congratulate you! That last intellectual speech of yours is——"

"Thanks, so nice of you to appreciate it. It's quite original, I assure you," he interrupts, nothing abashed, notwithstanding my withering tone of sarcasm, and accompanying his remarks with an innocent expression, and one of his cheery smiles, which is exasperating.

"That, I never doubted for a moment. It's quite the nastiest I ever heard," I continue severely, but nothing crushes Nolly. Snubs are wasted upon him! He is indeed as irrepressible as a certain nineteenth century statesman who shall be nameless.

After this course follows a plate of

garbanzos. The next two dishes we decline, though I, being still hungry, cannot help regarding one mournfully, it consisting of stewed goat and tomato, but the preparation wallows in oil, which induces me to send the plates away with a shudder. "Once bit twice shy," and I realise that any more experiments in this way might be fatal. (N.B. Putrid olive oil in an acquired taste—one has to be educated up to it. The wine Nolly declares to be not half bad, but I object to a peculiar astringency it possesses, so prefer some whisky from my flask, and we finish our meal with olives.

Whatever be his feelings at our non-appreciation of his repast, the Spaniard makes no sign. There is, nevertheless, something repellent in the man's swarthy face. It is just such another countenance as one sees so ably depicted in M. Legrand's "Brigands"—a cunning, cruel face.

He is indeed not the sort of person one would care to encounter unarmed on a dark night in this lonely part of the world. Many times during dinner I glance at the man; if nothing else he is decidedly

picturesque, and exercises an extraordinary fascination over me.

Again and again my eyes wander back to him, and more than once I note he is gazing fixedly with a curious, indescribable look at something connected with the table. For some minutes I cannot find out what this is, but as Nolly raises his glass to his lips, I discover what has fascinated the Spaniard.

On the fourth finger of his left hand Meredith invariably wears a diamond ring, which was, I believe, a year ago left him by a discriminating aunt. It is a superb stone. Even in this dim light the brilliant is scintillating and flashing with every movement of the wearer. This then has attracted the innkeeper's attention.

When we are alone, and dinner over, we sit chatting by the stove, I remonstrate with Nolly in taking such a valuable jewel about on his travels, and inform him of the covetous glitter in the Spaniard's eyes, but Meredith merely laughs that the ring is perfectly safe on his finger, so that after an hour's smoke we retire to our room, and I mentally determine to

keep my uneasy feelings to myself. We are no sooner in our room, than I make the unpleasant discovery that there is no fastening to the door.

The latter is a remarkable one, the upper half being composed of panes of glass, the lower row of those only being covered with a flimsy blind, so there is nothing to prevent anyone so disposed from looking in.

The whole affair is out of keeping with the sombre panelling and dark ceiling above the whitewashed walls, and that it should be here is a matter of no little wonder to me. The bed stands in a recess to the left of the fireplace, and as I glance towards it a sudden idea inspires me.

"Look here, Nolly. Why shouldn't we have the bed before the fire? This great barn of a room is awfully cold, eh?" I say briskly as if the idea had but just occurred to me, but Meredith who is tremendously drowsy, does not receive the suggestion with the appreciation it deserves.

"Oh! such a bore to move it," he says sleepily, regarding the Brobding in the corner as he undresses.

"It's bound to be damp—that's a certainty



—an absolute certainty,” grimly, “and we shall probably get lumbago, neuralgia, possibly rheumatic fever, or some other dire disease; it is offering a premium to any of them,” I say gloomily, piling on the agony, and ingeniously introducing the last-mentioned complaint. It is Meredith’s one susceptible point; knowing this I play upon it to gain my point. Ever since that bad attack of rheumatism, after a wet day’s shooting on the moors, during our last sojourn in the Emerald Isle, Meredith entertains a holy horror of the rheumatics and looks upon the latter as his most deadly enemy.

“Eh! You think so? By Jove! Let us have it out then!” he says, eyeing the bed ruefully, and in another moment we have lifted it into the centre of the room, which is in view of the glass door.

Meredith is soon in bed, and a prolonged snore tells me he is asleep, but tired out as I felt an hour ago, now sleep seems to have deserted me strangely, and as I sit by the fire I cannot get the innkeeper’s diabolical face from my mind. Never before has such an uncomfortable impression taken

hold of me. Before getting into bed, I pile on some more pine logs, but even their delicious aroma fails to do away with the peculiar musty odour which pervades the apartment, and which sets me hankering after a clothes peg to keep my nasal extremity in subjection, like the gentleman depicted by "Punch" some years ago, when the Serpentine was not so sweet as it is now.

As a last precaution, with first a glance in the direction of Nolly to see if he is still claimed by Morpheus, I barricade the door with a small rickety table—one leg indeed refuses to hold any communion with the floor—the portmanteau, and anything else I can lay my hands on, and placing a revolver on a chair beside me get into bed.

Meredith snores on comfortably—he never desists for a moment, though I unceremoniously bundle him over to the opposite side of the bed, which brings me into better view of the door.

But sleep I cannot. All is still. There is no sound but the crackling of the pine logs, and the tap-tapping of a giant

## 286 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

cork tree against the window, mingling with Nolly's somnolent grunts.

The latter irritate me to such a degree that I cannot resist giving him sundry and manifold punches, which at last have the desired effect, for he turns over on his side and sleeps quietly.

An owl hoots by the window, and causes me to start in a way that at any other time I should consider ridiculous, but to-night something has disturbed me strangely, and so I lie with wakeful eyes, gazing at the fire.

I have just begun to realise what a fool I am to let these fancies get the dominion over me.

It seems such a senseless thing that I—Ian Campbell, *ætat* twenty-eight, a healthy fellow with as much bone and a good deal more muscle than most of H.M.'s officers in the gallant "Royal Scots"—as the array of cups in my quarters at "Gib" can testify—should become possessed of a sudden, with such an abominable and superfluous affliction as "nerves," and I envy Meredith his unruffled repose, as courting slumber I turn my head away from the

fire, when a sudden impulse induces me to glance towards the door.

For an instant my heart seems to stand still, and then it sets to beating in an uncomfortable manner. Thump! thump! it goes; the sledge-hammer of novelists is a feeble thing to it!

And what do I see?

Above the muslin blind a man's face glaring in, and in the low forehead, and cunning, cruel eyes I recognise our Spanish landlord. His face is almost pressed against the glass. I can see it distinctly as I lie still with half closed eyes. The fire has dulled down, but through the skylight in the narrow stone-paved passage, a flood of moonlight is clearly revealing the cruel, vindictive face.

My first impulse is to sit up in bed, but by a great effort I control myself, and refrain from motioning my hand in the direction of my revolver, deeming it unwise to let the man discover that I am aware of his presence. Who knows but that there may be more of his kind behind him? Horrible things I have heard of banditti and robbers come before me, and I hastily



decide my plan of action.

It is nothing more than a violent fit of coughing—not a very difficult matter when one has been lying on the broad of one's back with bated breath for some minutes.

How I cough! (inflammation of the larynx is a joke to it) keeping meanwhile a vigilant, though apparently unintentional, eye on the door.

At the first sound the Mephistophilean face moves back a little.

So much I note with satisfaction. Then as I sit up in bed coughing violently it vanishes altogether; even then I do not cease my exertions for at least a full minute.

Then I creep cautiously from the bed, and peer out into the passage.

No sign of life is there: the moonbeams are pouring a silver flood through the skylight and God's watchers—the stars—peep in; and as I stand perplexed—nervous—listening—wondering, beside the door, I cannot help regarding with unlimited admiration one of those far-off planets which seem even more wondrously beautifully brilliant than its compeers.

Having made up the fire, I return to bed now more than ever wide awake as I realise my uneasiness has not been without reason.

As I lie watchful, I debate whether it will not be better to wake Nolly, and I go so far as to shake him slightly, but he is sleeping so soundly it seems almost impossible to rouse him, and my first effort having been unsuccessful, I leave him in peace, and return to my lonely vigil. Half an hour passes and then I become conscious of a peculiar sound.

At first I pay little heed to it, thinking it may be but the wind; but as time goes on, and the curious sound continues I listen intently.

Again and again it comes—a low moaning as of a human soul in mortal agony.

I bury my head in the bed-clothes, but do what I will I cannot avoid hearing that awful, weird thing. Slowly, monotonously, it continues. And once I fancy I hear the sound of sobbing. There is a pause;—those awful moans begin again.

Will the horrible sound never cease? Do what I will it comes to me with awful,

agonising distinctness.

At length I can stand it no longer. I seem to have lain here for hours, suffering torture, and if those frightful moans continue, I feel I shall go mad, or call aloud.

"Meredith! Nolly," I say faintly, but my voice comes back to me, only a wraith of its former self, and I realise that to waken him I must throw off this terror that is upon me, and rouse myself to greater exertions.

He lies like a log in a sound dead sleep.

"For Heaven's sake, Nolly, rouse up," I say, as I thump and hustle him to any extent; even then he is ready to drop off into a doze again.

"Confound you, Smithies! It isn't my parade this morning, and how often am I to tell you to use that insect powder. Bitten doesn't describe it. I've been nearly eaten alive," he murmurs sleepily, turning over for renewed slumber, and I commence my rousing tactics with even greater vigour.

This time with more success, as I at least succeed in getting him to sit up in

bed, though he ridicules my assertions as the result of nightmare.

"Indigestion—small wonder you've got an attack of the blue devils. It is that abominable mess we had at dinner. Moral: flee from rotten olive oil; shun it as a plague in future," he says, yawning sleepily, no doubt wishing me at Bath, Jericho, or any other of the convenient places ready to receive those people who commit the unpardonable offence of boring their fellow beings.

"Meredith—I've never been to sleep! I give you my word," I say solemnly in a low tone, the horror of those sounds still upon me, and I realise thankfully that at last Nolly, if sceptical, is awake, though he insists that that face at the door is merely some phantasy born of a restless brain.

All the time I am speaking I am conscious that those weird, mysterious moans still continue.

"Hark! Do you not hear anything?" I question impatiently.

"Only that branch tapping against the window."



"No, no, not that," I murmur. Even as I speak something in his face tells me that he too has heard it: that awful, weird sound which has haunted me for so long.

"I believe you are right after all. I—too hear something. Listen!" he says lowering his voice.

"What?" I answer breathlessly, unspeakably thankful that at last the sleep demon has deserted Nolly, and left him in his proper senses. A sensation of keen relief darts through my brain as I realise that I am not mad, for since I listened to Meredith's incredulous speeches a horrible suspicion has haunted me that either my reason was leaving me or that the face at the door was merely an hallucination—a fiendish freak of fancy.

"A peculiar sound of someone in great pain. What the dickens can it be," he murmurs.

Once more there is silence between us. Then—those awful mysterious moans are lost in a thing which startles Nolly well nigh out of his seven senses, and my own heart seems cold and numb with an indescribable sense of unutterable horror.

A terrible series of shrieks ring out—shrill, awful cries, which seem first at our feet, and then recede from us, growing fainter and yet fainter till, they die away in the distance, and then cease abruptly, and once I could swear I heard the word "Help."

This is too much for flesh and blood.

"All right! Hulloo! hulloo there!" I shout involuntarily with all the strength of a well-conditioned pair of lungs.

There is the sound of footsteps; the creak of a rusty hinge, as a door shuts. Then all is still. Springing out of bed we again stand listening.

"By Jove! What an appalling sound," Nolly says in a horrified whisper, and as he stirs the fire into a blaze I see his face is very pale; my own must be positively green, judging from my lively sensation at the present moment.

"Good Heavens! Nolly! a woman's voice and English," I answer, taking up my revolver. Even as I do so there is a knock at the door. Lifting the flimsy blind we perceive the innkeeper alone. Then cautiously opening the door a crack,

we inquire what he wants. In mingled French and Spanish he informs us that he has come to apologize for, and explain away a slight noise, which must have disturbed the Señors, but he has the misfortune to have a mad sister in the house, and *Corpo de Baccho!* She is very bad to-night, "*infuriée comme un diable*," he puts it with his oily manner, then having accepted his explanation, we go back to the fire.

"If ever a man lied, that fellow has just done so. Meredith—I distinctly heard the word "help." I don't believe a word of what he told us," I say vehemently as we sit discussing the affair.

Nothing will induce me to return to bed, and Meredith elects to remain beside me. No longer apprehensive of ridicule I inform him of my forebodings ever since dinner, and we both agree that we have fallen amongst thieves, and that it behoves us to keep our eyes open.

All through the silent hours, and long after grey dawn has crept into the room, that word "help" rings in my ears, and those heart-rending shrieks haunt me like a

demon. Even Apollo peeping in through the shutters cannot dispel the horror of the night.

I have just finished dressing when, an astonishing exclamation from Meredith sends me hastening across the room, to where he is standing by the fireplace.

"Good Heavens! Campbell. Look here," he says pointing to the floor. Then going down on his knees he lifts a strip of matting. It is in the exact position where our bed stood last night previous to our moving it.

"By all that's wonderful—a trap-door Phew!"—I relieve my feelings by a long low whistle.

"Yes, beneath the bed," Meredith says solemnly, and our eyes meet in one long significant look. Then, after a short discussion, we essay to raise the door in the floor, and a few moments later succeed, and lifting it carefully, lean it back against the wall.

It is a long narrow door, about four feet by two. A whiff of foul air causes us to desist for a moment—small wonder our room smells mouldy! and then we peer down in



what appears to be an underground chamber.

A keen desire to explore this takes possession of me. I discover that the chamber beneath is empty, and heedless of Nolly's remonstrance I lower myself into it. The place is not above seven feet in depth, and easily enough I land on the earthen floor of the underground chamber. Shutting my eyes for a few seconds to get accustomed to the darkness—for with the exception of the light from a small iron grating near the floor of our room the place is all in gloom. I look round me. A heavy iron-bound door on my right evidently leads to the outer world, and just in front of me there is another massive door. Opening this cautiously I perceive what appears to be a subterranean passage leading below our room.

A wild unaccountable impulse leads me to explore this; and returning, I inform Nolly of my intentions.

In vain he protests something—I know not what—leads me on, and once more I go back to the underground passage, and am soon groping my way along.

I have not proceeded far before I discover that a series of small chambers on the left hand side open from the passage.

The doors of one or two stand ajar, others I open, after cautiously listening to discover whether the rooms are untenanted. All are more or less in darkness, with the exception of a small iron ventilator let into the wall evidently just above the outside earth, which admits enough light to enable me to see the small chambers' contents, not that there is much to see.

Five of these in succession are empty, though one appears to possess a few articles of wearing apparel.

In the last but one a peculiar odour sickens me, and glancing round I see a thing which sends a cold shudder through my veins.

It is a heap of mouldering bones! and in another corner, a human skull!

Sickened—horrified—I am about to rush from the place, but as I slip out into the passage a faint moaning arrests my attention.

It proceeds apparently from the last of the small chambers at the end of this

## 298 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

gloomy passage.

Wondering, listening, I stand irresolute. Shall I return to Meredith? I hesitate, and—am lost.

Continuing my way I stand before the door, and after a little fumbling lift a sort of rusty latch.

The grating sound has died away, when again those awful shrieks ring out, echoing, and re-echoing above my head, as it seems with ear-splitting vehemence. Again I pause.

What if this is indeed a mad woman—a creature without reason? Better explore no further I decide, and resolve to make my way out of the place.

Even as I turn away from the door the sound of a voice catches my ear, and I hear the words,

“Oh, Jack, they are coming, I hear them!”

Hesitating no longer I throw open the door, and pause on the threshold, and a man's voice moans, rather than speaks out of the gloom,

“Why not kill me at once? Better that than this torture!”

"Great Heavens! What is this," I ejaculate.

Then as I go forward I can just discern two figures. One, a man apparently not more than thirty, leans against the wall. He is attired only in his night clothes, and his hands are tied behind him to an iron girder. His feet are also bound together. Beside him kneels a girl with her hands fastened at her back. At the sound of my voice, she draws herself up from her crouching position, and turns her face to me. Never shall I forget the terrified, hunted look of the large eyes.

For a full minute neither of us speaks, then the look of horror fades slowly yet surely from her face. Twice the white lips open, and then she gasps beseechingly, with a glance at the man beside her.

"Oh! Jack! Save him. He is dying," the weak disjointed words drop from her and then—all is still.

But I need no more telling.

"Tis the work of a moment to cut the cruel bands that bind the bleeding wrists, and even as I do so the young fellow falls into my arms as one dead, and



## 300 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

I lift him, and lay him on the floor, flinging off my coat and wrapping it round him; then I cut the bands that bind the other little figure, who having made that one effort lies so still.

Is she dead I wonder? as I bend over her, and smooth back a golden tress of hair—like a new-born sunbeam, which has fallen across her face.

Such an exquisite childish face—beautiful even in its pallor, and I shudder to think I may be too late to save her, as I spring to my feet, and hasten back to Nolly as one in a dream.

I grope my way down the evil-smelling passage in the gloom.

What is it that sends me hastening on with even yet more speed? What do I hear?

A shot! A scuffle! Meredith's voice shouting "Campbell" lustily.

Then as I reach the outer chamber, and stand beneath the trap-door the noise above grows yet greater.

It is a veritable concentrated Bedlam.

There is a crash—bang—above my head. Then all is gloom. Bewildered, I stand in

the semi-darkness, and realise dismally that the trap-door over my head has been slammed to, and that I am shut in. Alone! alone in this horrible place with that loathsome thing, and two fellow beings dying—if not dead, for want of help—the very thought is maddening.

Have the villains killed Meredith—If so our chance of escape is indeed small. All is still. There is no sound above, and I realise that I must lose no time, but act.

The scoundrelly Spaniards may be even now on their way to murder me. How many there are I know not.

Rushing back to the subterranean passage in a paroxysm of desperation, I decide to shut myself in, and make a vigorous fight for life.

The heavy iron door swings to behind me. Again I am in darkness, and all is still.

Five—ten minutes go by—there is no sound but the ticking of my watch. The silence is awful: another fifteen minutes go by, and yet no sound, no sign. Evidently the scoundrels are in no hurry to begin the attack.

At length I can stand this no longer, so decide once more to enter that outer chamber, and endeavour to escape somehow, and secure aid.

Then I essay to open the massive iron-studded door. But all my efforts are useless, and after a violent struggle, panting, breathless, I lean against the wall, and the awful knowledge comes to me that the heavy door latches on the outside, and all unconsciously I have made myself a prisoner!

Again I try with all my strength to force it open; the wood and iron are relentless; my attempts have no effect, and at last I give it up, and go back to that chamber where those two lie as if dead.

Kneeling first beside the girl, I chafe the small cold hands, but for a long time she shows no sign of life, but at last comes a flicker of the eyelids, and with that returning life, and consciousness, and after a bewildered glance she breaks into passionate sobbing, and clings to me.

Forgetting my embarrassing situation, forgetting everything indeed save the awful fact that grim death is staring us in the

face, I utter soothing words, and do my utmost to stop those piteous sobs. Gradually they grow less vehement, and after a few minutes almost cease—I then turn my attention to the man.

Minute after minute goes by, and still I kneel on chafing the cold limbs. I tear up my handkerchief, and bind up the bleeding wrists, and though no sign of consciousness comes to him, at least I succeed in getting a little warmth into the still body. All this time a thousand horrible thoughts rush through my brain.

Is Meredith dead? Supposing the Spaniards have killed him, and fled from the place! and I pause aghast as I realise that this may mean for us a living tomb. Then Miss Carruthers—for such I learn is her name—tells me her terrible story.

It appears that for the last two months she, and her brother have been travelling in Spain. They arrived here only the night before us from Sananca, intending to go on to Espiéta—a town about ten miles from here. After dinner they (being tired from the journey) retired early to their rooms, suspecting nothing, and Miss Carru-



thers on rising was horrified to find herself locked in her room. All her efforts to escape being in vain, she remained there a prisoner till nearly dusk, when the inn-keeper had come to her, wrenched the rings from her fingers, dispossessed her of every article of jewellery, and finally binding her hands behind her, had carried her down to this loathsome place, where she remained in that out chamber moaning and weeping till near daylight. Then two Spaniards appeared with lanthorns and in a paroxysm of terror she fled shrieking down the dark passage; the door of this chamber stood open so she rushed in here where she found her brother bound hand and foot, even as I had found him.

The Spaniards did not follow her and she tried again and again to move the cruel ligatures cutting into her brother's wrists, but all to no purpose. Her own hands were tied, and she was helpless. Then she goes on to tell me of her brother's desperate struggle, how he was surprised and overpowered in his bed.

As I listen to the pitiful story, a dozen conclusions force themselves upon me. That

our driver and the Carruthers' driver is one, and the same I feel sure.

Small wonder his antiquated horses were equal only to a snail's pace, the enterprising Jehu having gone to Sananca and back in one day.

That the driver is an accomplice of the innkeeper I also make no doubt. The villains evidently intended to put an end to those two poor people before putting their second vile crime—that of murdering Meredith and myself—into execution. My answering shout to those terrified screams must have startled the villains, and sent the innkeeper hastening away to allay our suspicions with the trumped-up story of the mad woman.

Now I can account for Nolly's deep sleep; the wine of course was drugged at dinner. Is he dead I wonder? If so I am indeed his murderer, Bitterly I repent having left him at the mercy of those scoundrels; too late I reproach myself for venturing into this chamber of horror. It seems now like a voluntary entering into the jaws of death. Those, and a thousand such thoughts rush through my brain as

## 306 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

I assure Miss Carruthers that help will come—nay—must come sooner or later.

Long ago the sad eyes have learnt from my evasive answers the real facts of the case, and that I too am a prisoner.

As time goes, I can no longer meet the wistful eyes before me, for hope is flying and my heart sinks.

Twice again I sally forth into the narrow passage, and exert all my strength to get free, but the heavy iron-studded door does not give even a creak. Again and again I endeavour to force it open till at last faint, and sick for want of food and thoroughly disheartened, I realise that to get out I must find some other means of escape. Each of the small chambers I enter in turn, I even make my way into the one which contains that loathsome thing, probably some victim, and I wonder in a vague sort of way if we shall share the same fate, if my bones will lie here rotting like the ones before me.

Going down on my knees I examine every nook and cranny. Passing my hand over the dank, cold stone a sharp stinging causes me to desist for a moment, and

drawing my hand away in the gloom I perceive some loathsome thing clinging to it; it is a pulpy, slimy worm.

With a shudder of disgust I fling the thing from me, and again continue my examination, but the solid walls give out no hope of escape, and once more I step out past the mouldering skeleton, and return to that other chamber, where those other two lie almost as if dead.

Spent with exhaustion and anguish Miss Carruthers has fallen asleep, and with her head on her brother's arm. Her loosened hair falls in great waves of gold, over her dark serge gown, and as I look down upon the little sleeping form, and note the beautiful face,—such an exquisite face—arch yet tender, sorrowful yet *piquante*, some lines from Mr. Lowell's "Ember Picture" steal into my mind. Had they been written for her, they could not describe her more aptly :

Tis a face that can never grow older,  
That never can part with its gleam,  
'Tis a gracious possession for ever,  
For is it not all a dream?

A great longing comes to me to be able



## 308 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

to save her, and I go down on my knees and pray as I have never prayed before.

It is close upon three o'clock when I again rise from my knees. A baby sunbeam—a little inquisitive fairy—steals through the iron grating, and flickers for an instant on the sleeper's face, dancing lightly over the closed eyes, then vanishing lingeringly—lovingly—it disappears with a slow reluctance, as if born of a desire to caress the pallid roseleaf face. Will nothing avail?

It is maddening to think that I—a strong man—am so helpless.

Nerve—muscle—heart—brain—of no use; all worthless, and I smile grimly as the thought comes to me, that should the Spaniards keep me here much longer they will be able to do what they will with me, for I shall be capable of little resistance. Already I feel faint and sick from the foul air, and the craving pangs of hunger. My hands are lacerated and bleeding from my attempts to open that door, and my futile efforts to remove the grating which, small as it is, would at least allow a little fresh air to enter.

Another hour goes by, the suspense is terrible.

Silently, miserably, I lean against the wall, taking care to make no sound, deeming it the most merciful thing I can do to let that little grief-stricken figure forget her sufferings even if only for a time in the blessed oblivion of sleep, while I can only watch, and wait, and pray.

Never before has life seemed so beautiful, such a thing altogether to be desired. It seems an Eternity since I set eyes on God's exquisite outside world. My past life rises vividly before me, and despair is heightened by the regretful sadness of retrospect.

Was it only yesterday we came to this hateful place?—only to-day I looked upon Nolly's handsome *débonnaire* face?

Only yesterday! It seems a year ago! and a hard dry sob—an unendurable sob—breaks from me and sounds weird in the horrible stillness.

Ashamed of my weakness, fearful lest she should wake, and find me unmanned, I step carefully out. The increasing gloom makes it almost impossible to find one's

way without stumbling, for long ago that baby sunbeam has died a natural death, and as I stand again in the passage I realise that night is upon us. Rousing myself I determine to make one last effort to open the door, when hark! what is that?—a sound of voices; a treading of many feet in the room above!

Has the time come for a hand to hand conflict? Better that than this maddening suspense. The conversation above becomes greater—louder—it is carried on in Spanish.

Listening eagerly I stand; my breath comes hard and fast, and then—then I realise a sound which causes my heart to beat wildly and a flutter of hope to thrill through my veins. Am I dreaming? Am I mad? And yet—and yet—I thought I heard a well known voice—Meredith's.

I strain my ears, and listen; I hear footsteps in the outer chamber; the door is flung open and Nolly—dear old Nolly advances with a lighted torch in his hand.

"Campbell! Where are you?" he shouts, but speech seems to have deserted me—my tongue refuses to answer those welcome thrilling tones. No matter; he

strides towards me, and reaching my side gives my hand such a hearty grip as causes my bleeding knuckles to smart again.

Then silently, swiftly, I take him to where those two pitiable fellow sufferers are lying.

Bending, I attempt to lift the girl, but even the slender figure is too much for me, and reluctantly I stand back, and make way for one of the sturdy Spanish soldiers, who has entered with Meredith, and a moment later I am following the little procession into the outer chamber, where I realise dimly, but with infinite thankfulness that we are saved—saved by a merciful Providence from a living death of starvation, and perhaps worse horrors.

'Tis a week later. Seven days have passed since that awful time when we stood face to face with the grim spectre—Death. It seems but yesterday we so nearly played in a terrible tragedy, but nevertheless seven whole days have fled since that terrible time when Meredith had his desperate encounter with the innkeeper



and his accomplice, after which he rushed from the place to secure aid, and losing his way wandered over the plains till near sunset then he reached Espiéta, and returned with an escort of soldiers to Vedrill to find the *fonda* deserted, and us three poor mortals shut into that loathsome place with those mouldering bones.

The past week in Espiéta with the Carruthers is over and my leave is up to-morrow and I have distinguished myself by falling neck and crop into love.

This, our last evening with them is drawing to a close; we have fallen into two groups. Jack Carruthers is still suffering from the shock and exposure in that underground chamber, and he and I sit talking in the little *salon* of the Hotel. The open windows at one end of the room, lead on to a small balcony embowered in apricot trees. Leaning over the railing, looking down into the street, stand Meredith and Miss Carruthers, and as their bright conversation and laughter are wafted into the room I long with all my soul to go and talk to Lauraine, but some stupidity akin to shyness—a totally new experience

to me—keeps me back, and here in the *salon*, as I talk to her brother I find myself meanly listening to the conversation at the window.

“And so you leave us to-morrow?” she is saying with a little regretful air to Nolly.

“Yes—we go back to the usual grind, worse luck. But we shall see you again soon. Remember you’ve promised to come to Gib. It’s a bargain, Miss Carruthers,” Meredith says gaily.

“Yes—perhaps—” dubiously—“when Jack is strong enough to move,” and the brown eyes glance wistfully in our direction.

“Oh! yes, you really must you know. We shall be so awfully disappointed if you don’t, and besides it’s your bounden duty to see the Rock. Only think you may never be so near it again. We’ll do the honours famously; introduce you to the very nicest of ‘our fellows’; get up all sorts of festivities in your honour; show you the specialities in our quarters, Campbell’s trophies and my musical instruments. I tootle on five you must know and—er—” evidently racking his

brain for further attractions—"Nellie oh yes, you must see Nell," this last with, an air of great conviction. The rosy kissable lips, that know so well how to take upon themselves a bewitching smile grow suddenly grave as she says suddenly,

"And—er—who is 'Nellie'? Tell me."

"Oh! she's Campbell's, you know, and such a charming creature. Quite the pet of the Regiment, and er—that," Nolly says, waxing eloquent as he gazes back at the *riante* face—(how I envy him)!

She leans towards him, and rests a rounded chin in the palm of one hand, but I fancy the roseleaf face is a trifle pale as she questions,

"Is she pretty?"

Nolly seems to be enjoying the situation amazingly, and for quite five minutes I positively hate him. 'Twould be an exquisite joy to me to rush forward and drop him over the balcony amongst the apricot trees! But he is speaking again so I control myself and listen.

"Oh! As for that, yes, such a skin and head! Her feet and legs are perfect, and—" a little indignant light creeps into

the brown eyes, and Lauraine's face flushes slightly as she draws her slight figure up with a little indignant air.

"Well, really—Captain Meredith!"—she begins, but her sentence is never finished.

"Eh! I thought you liked dogs," disappointedly.

"Dogs!" returns she a little bewildered.

"Yes. Nellie is a fox-terrier, don't you know! Did you—did you think—she was—"

"Mrs. Campbell! Yes," with a little blushing nod.

"This is too much for Nolly. He gives way to undisguised mirth.

"Well, how was I to know that you were rhapsodizing about a dog?" Miss Carruthers says in an injured tone. Then she too leans against the rail and a ringing peal of girlish laughter floats into the room. This at last attracts Jack Carruthers' attention, and together we stroll to the window and I, feeling an awful hypocrite, express a fervent desire to be told the joke—knowing it all the while—but Meredith is too far gone for speech.

For five seconds—no more—Miss Carruthers subdues her laughter and addresses him,



"Don't," she gasps feebly, regarding Nolly solemnly. "Captain Meredith, if you do I will never forgive you!" and again she gives way to mirth.

"I won't. Wild horses shan't drag it from me!" Nolly gasps.

After this conversation becomes general, and an hour later we retire to our rooms, the Carruthers having promised to meet us in a week's time, and as I sit ruminating far into the night, I think "Good-bye" the most beastly word in the English language.

A cool air; an azure sky; one fleecy cloudlet hanging motionless afar off in the blue ether; myriads of sunbeams sleeping on the sea, over which a baby wind creeps softly. The whole scene is as a study in gold and *lapis lazuli* lent from Paradise. *Sol lucet omnibus*, and Gibraltar lies in a golden radiance; the sun is gleaming on the sails of the fishing boats—dancing lightly on the deck of the huge P. & O. steamer which is cleaving her way through the blue Mediterranean just below us.

A crowd of passengers throng the decks and gaze with interested eyes on the famous

rock. They wave their handkerchiefs, and some of the soldiers give a flourish of caps. Away in the blue distance stands Tarifa Point.

All is still save the twitterings of some sparrows and the joyous music of a lark, which darts with a glorious thrill and then sinks back to earth like a falling leaf on a summer day; eleven swifts go rushing through the air; and a white gull moves over the blue waters.

Afar off a distant boom tells that some H. M. ships are practising, while further away a faint haze, too shadowy for cloud, too delicate for horizon, floats lightly, and presently the "Himalaya" homeward bound with troops from India, looms into view.

Such a scene I look down upon this glorious day, as I stand beside Miss Carruthers, who is sketching. A little to our left are the others—Carruthers, Nolly and Morris of "ours," discussing the approaching troopship.

For the last five minutes a silence has fallen upon us, and Miss Carruthers paints diligently.

This affords me the satisfaction of gazing

## 318 FROM THE JAWS OF DEATH

unobserved at the beautiful face before me. She looks up suddenly.

Perhaps something in my eyes betrays me, for the long sweeping lashes droop quickly, and a faint colour creeps into her face as she becomes more than ever absorbed in her sketch.

"Are not those shadows falling on the sea from the 'Rock' just lovely," she says, after a time, and then a sudden inspiration comes to me. I persuade her that she will get a much better view a little higher up, and a moment later I am carrying her painting things. A turn in the narrow path hides the others from view and we are alone.

A wild impulse comes to me to wait no longer, but gain or lose all. At first my vehemence startles her a little, but five minutes later I hold the girlish figure in my arms and rain down passionate kisses on the mobile childish mouth as I murmur,

"Oh! Lauraine, Lauraine; it seems too good to be true and—I thought it was Nolly all the time," and then a gentle whisper comes to me.

"No, Ian, it has always been you—only

you did not find out," and a mischievous yet tender gleam crosses her face.

The sound of voices remind us that there are others in the world beside we two. Lauraine has but just time to sit hastily before the easel, when the voices resolve into Carruthers, Nolly and Morris.

One of the trio enquires how the sketch is progressing, and Nolly after a hasty survey asks Miss Carruthers if she always does it this way, and if this is the latest idea in sketching. And as over Lauraine's face the warm crimson rushes, a glance shows me that we have given ourselves away for—the painting is upside down on the easel!

But what matters such a trifle now? *Sol lucet omnibus*, and has not she promised to be with me all through the years of the unknown future.



Crown 8vo., handsome cloth, gilt.

Price 6s.

THE  
**Earlier Adventures of  
a Naval Officer**

By **SIR SPENSER ST. JOHN, G.C.M.G.**

Author of "The Adventures of a Naval Officer." 1908

**The ATHENÆUM, says—**

"The scene of these adventures lies in Borneo, where the author is absolutely at home; and as we read the spirited accounts of expeditions against Pirates up the Rivers and in the Interior, of rescue parties, of the bravery and tact of Rajah Brooke, of adventures with man and beast, we have the satisfaction of knowing that these things actually happened to men whom the author knew, and whose names are written in the Naval and Colonial history of their country. For the general reader it will suffice to know that the picture of life in the Royal Navy and in Borneo during the early forties is drawn with intimate knowledge and with a due regard for proportion. The book deserves, and we hope will enjoy the success which its predecessor has, we believe, achieved."

**The GLOBE, says—**

"Sir Spenser St. John repeats the success made with his former volume of reminiscences. The book is admirable—simple, direct, and so full of exciting incident that any boy would be delighted to read it after his father had finished it himself."

**The TRIBUNE, says—**

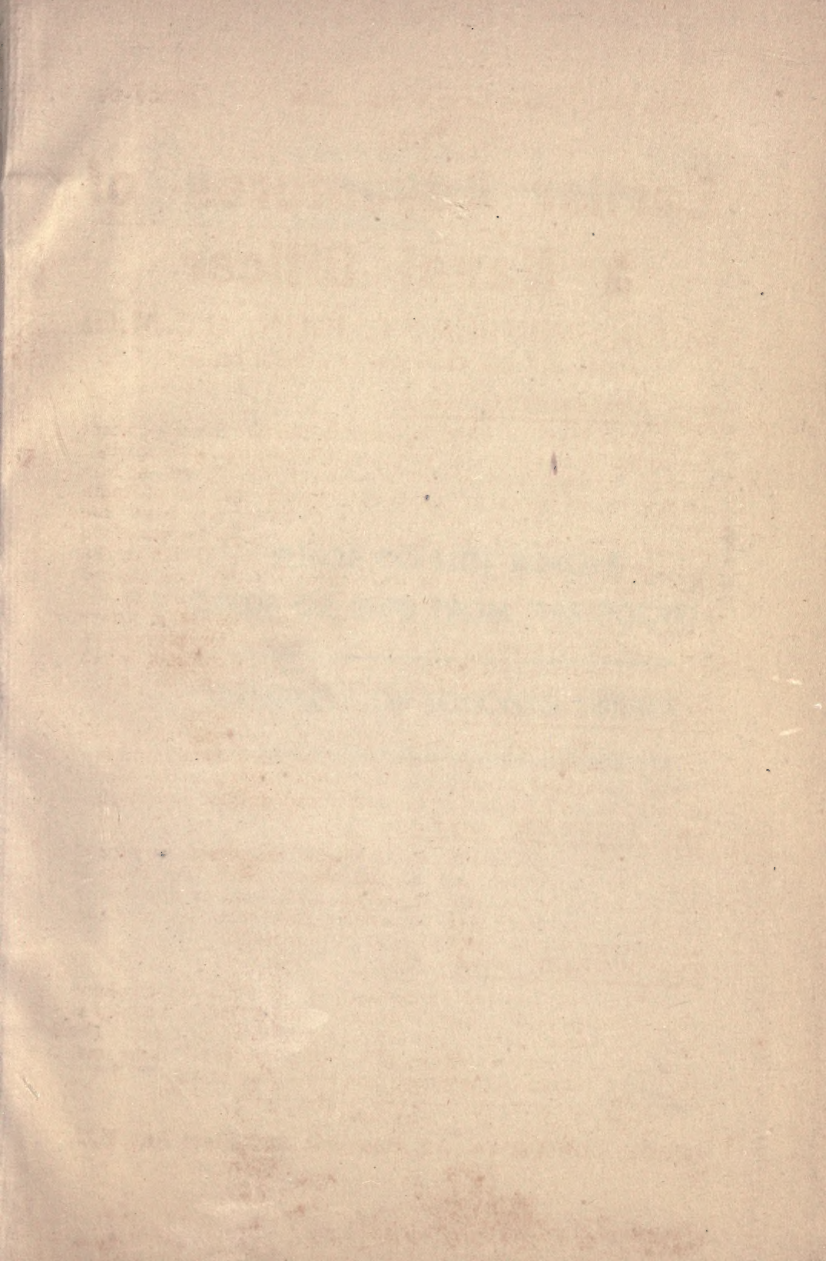
"The book contains an enjoyable assortment of stories about life in Borneo and its neighbourhood. The book is written in a bright and engaging style, and is filled with interesting anecdotes and adventures and may be cordially recommended to the lover of tales of adventure."

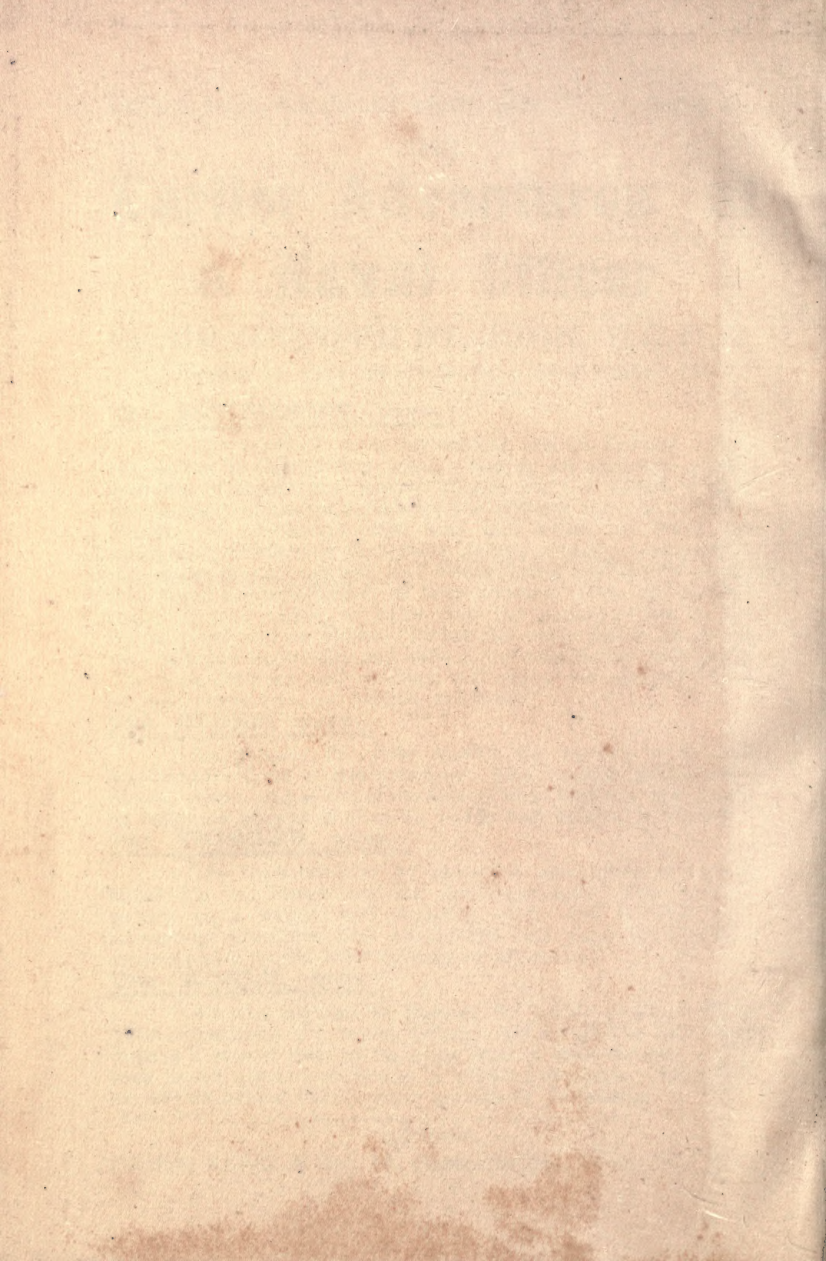
**The WORLD, says—**

"All who enjoyed Sir Spenser St. John's exciting volume 'The Adventures of a Naval Officer,' will be glad to know that there is a second treat of the same kind in store for them. The book is one continuous stream of exciting incidents; these real life stories cannot fail to prove immensely fascinating."

LONDON:

**DIGBY, LONG & Co., 18, Bouverie St., Fleet St., E.C.**







PR                      Starkey, E                      A                      (Henty)  
6037                      Australian shooting  
T189A8                      sketches

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE  
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

---

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

---



